

Calderdale Badger Protection Group

Working to protect badgers from all forms of persecution

2020 report



Badgers in cyberspace

The Calderdale Badgers Twitter account (@calderdalebadg1) was set up in August 2019, writes Lee Roberts.

By the end of 2020, we were following 692, we had 892 followers and I had made 8,464 tweets since 2019.

We have a very good friendship with Debbie Bailey of the Derbyshire Badger Vaccination Scheme. From her account @derbyshirebevs, she tags us in all her video posts, and this in turn increases the number of clicks on our account and helps to increase our followers.

I must say I enjoy running the account, even spending more time on it than my own personal account!

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Report compiled by Emily Rawlins

Cover photo shows Debbie Bailey, Derbyshire Badger Group, with our cub Emma.

The ones that didn't make it

It was a weekday morning in August, and the hotline was busy with multiple reports of an injured badger in a very public place, writes Marguerite Penny. Some people said they had posted the badger's whereabouts on Facebook, so I asked them to take those posts down for the badger's safety. Then I set off with the rescue equipment to meet Andrew and Jenny, two friends of the group, where the badger was last seen.

Word had got around and a number of people had gathered, so I asked those with dogs to put them on the lead. The badger would be traumatised enough without being set upon by a dog.

We couldn't find him anywhere, and we knew we had to in order that he wasn't found by dogs. After 30 minutes or so of looking under bushes and amid the undergrowth, we realised help was needed. I went home to collect Annabel the Labrador, who took us straight to the spot.

Keeping Annabel at a safe distance, I called Andrew and Jenny, who hurried along with the equipment.

The badger was an anguished looking fellow. He was drenched from swimming across a river, clearly exhausted and distressed with his head held low. The fact that this shy, night-time animal was out in broad daylight in full view of humans, whom he had every reason to fear, made the situation even more heartrending. He still had enough presence of mind that he did not want to get into the cage. However, Andrew managed to nudge him in.

We covered the cage with dark cloth. He had had a harrowing experience. A little girl who was sitting by the river with her mum was sobbing. What was going to happen? I told her that we'd take him to a vet who would make him better, and then he could go home to his family again. I hoped that would be the case.



He chittered all the way the way to the vet's. We shall never know what had happened to him, but he had internal injuries and a broken pelvis, so the decision was taken to put him to sleep. Quite likely he was yet another road traffic accident, and had been trying desperately to go home but was perhaps disorientated by pain. We'll never know. It was upsetting to think of his pain, distress and fear, but we were also aware that he had not had the horror of being attacked by dogs, and for that at least we knew that we had done the best we could for him.

In early September, we received a call from a member of the public who had found a badger hiding in her stable, writes Elaine Hey. The badger had no signs of physical injury but appeared traumatized. After an overnight stay at the vets, we attempted to release him where he had been found.

However, he refused to leave the crate, and we were not happy with his condition.

We were able to find a place for him in a rehabilitation centre in South Yorkshire. George, as we named him (pictured above), initially seemed to do well, and was moving around and eating. Unfortunately, however, his condition deteriorated and he passed away six days later. We took some solace from the fact that he died in a warm and comfortable place rather than being cold and hungry at the end.

- In 2020 we investigated 59 dead badgers, of which 54 were RTAs, two had been shot, one had drowned in a man-hole, one had been snared and one was old and probably sick. Three more were reported dead but never found... hopefully laid to rest by a caring member of the public.

From rescue to release — an orphan's journey



Little Emma is pictured following her rescue



Getting to know her new siblings!

The high point of our year was managing to save the life of Little Emma the badger cub, writes Elaine Hey

On 20 April 2020, one of our volunteers, Emma, was returning from monitoring a sett close to her home when she noticed a small badger cub out alone in daylight hours.

The cub disappeared into a hole when Emma approached, but the alarm was raised. A camera trap was set overnight, and the following morning footage showed no adult badgers in the vicinity of

the sett, but the cub was once again out alone.

We felt the cub was definitely vulnerable, probably orphaned, and in need of rescue.

Fortunately, with a lot of patience Emma was eventually able to capture the cub – a female aged approximately 10 weeks old. We named her Emma in honour of her rescuer, and managed to secure her a place at Cuan Wildlife Rescue in Shropshire.



A volunteer at Cuan Wildlife Rescue provides TLC



Following their release, Little Emma and a clan member are filmed foraging together on a wildlife camera

We followed her story closely as she was placed with a new little family of other orphaned cubs and raised and cared for.

On 15 September, they were all released together in a secret location in Derbyshire (not the cull zone) to begin their life in the wild.

Our Emma, the rescuer, was thrilled to be able to be present to witness the special moment.

Murky world of badger crime

When I took over as the group's Crime Liaison Officer in February 2020, one of the first things I did was meet with PC Matt Hamilton, Wildlife Crimes Officer for Calderdale, to agree a way of joint working in Calderdale and priority areas to develop.

Sadly, wildlife criminals weren't on Lockdown in 2020, with several unpleasant incidents affecting badgers in Calderdale. On the positive side, however, we learnt a lot and built a good relationship with the police, writes Lisa Wilkinson

Priorities for 2020

- A Crime Reporting Protocol for the group – this has been produced and distributed;
- Sharing intelligence – this has happened on many occasions, both from and to the police;
- Public awareness raising – this has been put on hold due to Covid restrictions;
- Sharing vulnerable sett data – this has happened on a need-to-know basis and has been helped by the development of Vulnerable Sett Criteria and the introduction of the data app;
- Awareness raising within the Police Force, ie Control Room staff and Neighbourhood Groups – this has been put on hold due to Covid.



Clockwise from top left, a dead badger found to have been snared; PC Matt Hamilton, Wildlife Crimes Officer; a sett deliberately blocked with rocks; and a trap made from a supermarket trolley, broom and raw meat

Badger crime in Calderdale

A number of incidents in 2020 resulted in reports to the police:

- Two dead badgers at the beginning of the year were found to have been shot, both on golf courses;
- A dead badger on a footpath was found to have been snared;
- Two blocked setts – one a domestic incident in a garden and one in woodland likely linked to another wildlife crime;
- One sett was damaged by mountain bikers in woodland;
- A number of setts were damaged during digging for antique bottles;
- One sett was damaged as part of a building development.

All these incidents were opened as active cases by the police, but none have led to

any further action. Some are still ongoing.

Our WCO has been proactive in going out with members of the group to talk to members of the public who are suspected of involvement in wildlife crime.

Training

Alongside other badger groups in West Yorkshire and Lancashire, we were fortunate to receive training in October 2020 from Inspector Kelly of North Yorkshire Police, Chair of the National Badger Protection Priority Delivery Group, and Geoff Edmond, National Wildlife Officer for the RSPCA.

We learnt that in order for a case to go to court we need evidence that a badger sett is in current use. A damaged sett needs to be preserved as a crime scene.

Currently the police do not keep statistics on wildlife crime, and this needs to

change as there is no national picture.

Our group was asked to present training to 60 PCSOs and PCs in Calderdale to raise awareness of badger crime. Unfortunately, due to Covid this had to be postponed.

Priorities for the coming year

- Continue our working relationship with the police – there are two other PCs in Calderdale who are interested in wildlife crime;
- Produce a joint strategy for tackling the problem of bottle digging;
- Gather intelligence on individuals who present a risk to badgers;
- Increase our skills in recording sett data, particularly for vulnerable setts in case this is needed for evidence in any prosecution.



From left, Steve, Kim and Elaine take a break from sett finding



From left, Paul, Steve, Elaine and Liz celebrate finding a particularly elusive sett in eastern Halifax

Boots on the ground

Elaine Hey looks back on some of the tasks carried out by volunteers in north and east Calderdale to keep badgers safe during 2020

The North / East Subgroup is the branch of Calderdale Badger Protection Group that take care of the area from Sowerby Bridge in the west to Shelf in the east, including north and central Halifax and the Lower Calder Valley. This is a taste of what our intrepid team got up to on badger protection duties during 2020.

Sett searching

Sett searching is the bread and butter of our activity. In order to protect our badgers, obviously we must first find them. Acting from information from members of the public or just on intuition, we seek out setts by following tell-tale signs of badger activity:

- Badger paths through fields, undergrowth, etc;
- Pool! We get excited at the sight of a fresh latrine!
- Badger footprints (*above*) – five distinct toes with claws and a kidney-shaped pad;
- Hair caught on a fence;



- Snuffle holes – a tell-tale sign of badgers foraging for worms.

A memorable day!

In July 2020, after several months searching, we found an elusive sett in woodland in eastern Halifax. This sett is in danger from a proposed housing development a short distance away, so we were happy that, having found it, we can now ensure that the badgers are taken care of with suitable mitigation measures if the development goes ahead.

Unusual setts

In 2020 we found a few setts which differed from the norm. It's always interesting to see something a little bit different.

In February 2020 a local school called us out to take a look at a hole under a portacabin on site. Video evidence confirmed that this was indeed



Also in February 2020, it was rather depressing to find that badgers had dug a sett entrance under a long since discarded fridge freezer. Fortunately, this was only one of several holes in an active woodland sett. It's sad to think of our local wildlife having to live amongst human rubbish.

In October 2020, a large badger hole appeared virtually overnight on the lawn of a garden in Halifax! Guidance and support were given to the householders, who have learned to love their uninvited guests after

seeing footage from our trail cameras.

The photos to the left show two of the wonderful badger setts which we monitor regularly. Above is one of our ruggedly beautiful more remote



setts, while below is a well disguised active main sett nestling among beautiful spring bluebells!

Setts under threat?

Calderdale Council wants to build on greenfield sites — but what about the badgers that live there? Anthony Arak of our Planning Subgroup recalls an Autumn rummaging through undergrowth so that we could speak up on behalf of wildlife



Above, Anthony conducts a survey, and left, a table summarises the group's key findings

Site Category	Meaning	No. of Sites	% of Sites
RED	Badger sett on site	21	16%
ORANGE	Badger activity on site	52	40%
YELLOW	Closest sett within 50m of site boundary	4	3%
GREEN	Closest sett within 200m of site boundary	5	4%
BLUE	Site falls within BAZ	33	26%
INDIGO	None of the above. No evidence of badgers	13	10%

Loss of habitat is a serious threat to badgers, and never more so than now, as Calderdale Council's Local Plan specifically proposes developments on greenfield sites rather than recycling industrial land. As a consequence, badgers are becoming increasingly urbanised, living in parks and gardens where some people consider them a nuisance.

In cases when planning permission is refused on the grounds of protecting wildlife, developers challenge the decision, and councils often cannot afford the legal fees so have to cave in.

Our Planning Subgroup decided to assess all sites in the Calderdale Local Plan for their likely effect on badgers. Using the historic findings stored in our database, supplemented where necessary by site visits, we managed to produce a report which was submitted to the council in November 2020.

Materials and methods

In early 2020, our badger data was moved from an Excel spreadsheet to an app called QGIS (Geographical Information System). Badger information can now be recorded easily in the field and shared between members of the group.

All 181 Local Plan sites were mapped in QGIS, then checked for proximity to the group's data records. We noted any signs of badgers on the site itself or within 200 metres of the site boundary, and checked aerial views. Fifty sites were excluded as too industrial or otherwise unlikely to support badgers, leaving 131 possible habitats. During September and October

2020, group members carried out site walkovers at all these sites that had not been previously explored.

At three sites access was not possible, so these were excluded.

Each site was searched for signs of badgers: setts, dung pits or latrines, foraging signs, well-used badger paths, badger guard hairs on fences, or reports of badger sightings nearby.

We also noted whether the site fell within the Wildlife Habitat Network (WHN).

Findings

Of the 21 sites on which badger setts were found, 16 occurred in our Badger Alert Zone (BAZ — a habitat favoured by badgers for constructing setts). Remarkably, 40% of all Local Plan sites showed evidence of badger activity, meaning the site was used by badgers for foraging or for commuting between setts and foraging areas.

Ten out of the 11 large sites in the Local Plan (defined as those greater than 10 hectares) had a badger sett or setts present on site or within 50 metres of the site boundary.

Recommendations

Our results demonstrate that more than half of all Local Plan sites in semi-natural habitat have resident badgers on site, or act as foraging or commuting areas for badgers. Therefore development will have a significant impact on badgers at many sites, and extended badger surveys will be

necessary, including proposals for mitigation.

Although none of the sites examined in this survey are designated Local Wildlife Sites of substantive nature conservation value, some sites are next to such sites, or fall within the Wildlife Habitat Network.

Of all sites examined, there were 34 sites in which 50% or more of the area proposed for development falls within the WHN, and 11 in which 100% of the site is enclosed within the WHN. Any development on these sites would seem to contradict the National Planning Policy Framework, which seeks to safeguard local wildlife-rich habitats, wildlife corridors and stepping-stones that connect them.

On the larger sites enclosing habitats of ecological importance, we recommended that all areas that fall within the WHN should be removed from the Local Plan.

In some cases, and with thoughtful forward-planning, development could actually provide an opportunity to boost biodiversity. Relatively small features can sometimes achieve important benefits for wildlife. For example, a narrow buffer zone around a building site, planted with native fruit trees, may deliver a supplement to badgers' diets in the autumn, and allow them to pass by on their nightly commute to alternative foraging sites.

We hope our suggestions and recommendations will be duly considered in the Local Plan hearings, and later at the planning stage.



Two of our most lucrative fundraising ideas have been Christmas cards designed by Kate Powell and Shelley's jam

Jam-packed with funding ideas

Unlike many groups, we remained firmly in the black in 2020, writes Treasurer Tracey Morris

Despite all the Covid restrictions and Lockdown in 2020, overall we didn't do too badly financially, with a net income of £4,006 and a very healthy bank balance of £10,317.84 at the close of the year.

Of course, being in Lockdown meant we didn't have chance to spend much money. Our main expense was at the beginning of the year when we were full of vaccination anticipation and bought some cages for £1,380. The rest of our expenses were either day-to-day running (Badger Trust levy, insurance) or money associated with fundraising (buying merchandise, spending on postage and PayPal fees).

Thank you to Mr Lumpy and Friends in Stockport who continued to support us through the year, donating a total of £415.

Obviously we couldn't attend fairs or car boots in 2020, so sales were either online (via the website or Facebook) or through shops and cafes.

Huge thanks must go to Sally and staff at Tod Almighty in

Todmorden, who sold our jam, wooden badgers, toy badgers, face masks and Christmas cards to a wonderful amount of £1,742.

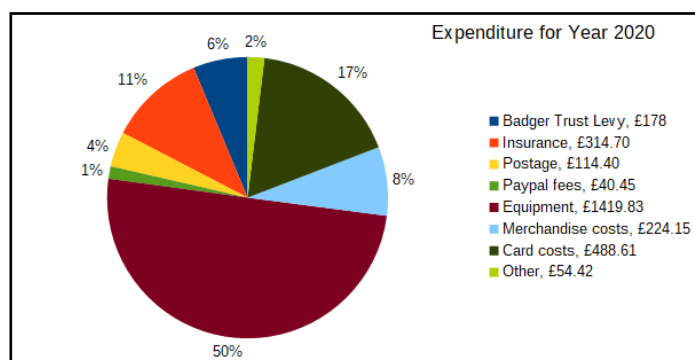
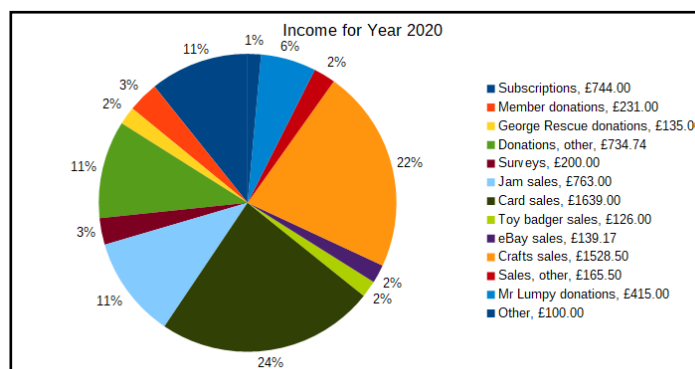
Also thanks to Lisa and Antoinette at the Coffee Station in Hebden Bridge — sales didn't start here until mid-October but still raised a fabulous £562.



Sales through these two businesses provided HALF our net income for the year. It would be great if we could find a friendly outlet in north or east Calderdale. If anyone knows of a shop or cafe willing to stock our cards and crafts, and is willing to keep them topped up, please get in touch.

Our 2020 Christmas card was designed by the very talented Kate Powell. We had 300 packs printed to add to the 100 packs remaining of last year's two designs. Of these 400 packs, we were left with only 12 at the end of the year. Amazing. Net income from the cards was £1,150, with the original artwork selling for a further £60.

After card sales, our biggest money maker was crafts. Just over £1,000 was raised from



handcrafted gifts, including £350 from the sale of face masks made by our member Emma's mother-in-law, £195 from the gorgeous pendants made by Sara Parkes (pictured left), and £333 from Cath Baker's wooden badger tree decorations.

Huge thanks to Joanne for organising Facebook sales and to Joanne and Cath for crafting other items for sale.

Shelley's jam sales were up by 50% on last year. Thank you to everyone who provided fruit, especially Sally Hayes, Leila Oates, Bev and Cath McGregor and Eileen and Paul Hanson, and thanks to everyone who

provided or returned jars for refilling. We are always looking for more fruit for jam-making, either fresh or frozen.

Ebay sales were only a quarter of what they were in 2019. There are some items in storage which can be sold, but we really need a member or two who can be dedicated eBay sellers.

Finally, the appeal for George the badger road victim raised £135, which though tragically not needed in the end for George, is there when needed for further rescues.

Thank you to our many fabulous supporters who keep our finances buoyant.



From left, Eva, Amy and Lee survey the vaccination zone.



From left, Cath, Eva and Amy find signs of badgers

Badger tracking and TB tracing

Move over Pfizer and AstraZeneca — Cath Baker looks back on a year's developments in our fight against another respiratory infection

What a year to be planning a vaccination project to protect against a respiratory illness!

We started 2020 full of optimism. As West Yorkshire is a low risk area for bovine tuberculosis (bTB), our aim was to focus our limited resources on those badgers who MAY have been exposed to the disease though pasture used by infected cattle.

We had two sites identified and surveyed, and had built relationships with the landowners and farmers. The good news, in a world of rapidly changing vaccine prices, was that we did not have huge numbers of badgers to vaccinate – while badgers can and will thrive on moorland, it is rarer to find them on the wild and windy moors.

As a young group, we have been on a

learning curve. We discovered that one area where we were hoping to vaccinate badgers in response to a “breakdown” of bTB in cattle had not actually had any confirmed cases. Some cattle had reacted to the bTB test, but later transpired to have been false positives. This was great news for the farmer – and for Calderdale’s badgers, as it meant that they could not have been exposed to the disease.

Our vaccination area narrowed to the single area with a confirmed breakdown. With the farmer and other landowners on board, and a reasonable prior knowledge of where the badger setts were in the area, we surveyed the land in merry bands of socially distanced sixes. Then twos! As Covid hit and the restrictions took effect, we carried on as best as we could within public health guidelines, but stopped

knocking on doors. Meanwhile we took delivery of large pallet of cage traps, and gathered the other equipment we needed.

Whilst out surveying we happened upon a local vet, whose practice agreed to be our prescribing and overseeing vets for the vaccination project, which is a fantastic step forward.

The project owes a debt of gratitude to the fundraising members who battled against the odds and still managed to bolster our vaccination pot, and to supporters who have been so generous in their donations – particularly Mr Lumpy and Friends.

So, by the end of 2020, we felt we had progressed, grown, learnt lessons, and are now ready to apply for the Natural England licence, and to push on with whatever 2021 may bring!

Calling out the cull



In summer 2020, the devastating news broke that the Government was planning to shoot 62,000 badgers in the autumn. This would be an 85% increase on the 2019 toll, and include five counties which had never before allowed culling – including, most upsetting of all, Derbyshire.

Derbyshire has the UK’s most successful badger vaccination project, and many of our members have volunteered for the scheme or trained there as vaccinators. The idea that the same badgers we

helped to protect against bTB could be in the firing line felt outrageous.

To show their strength of feeling, Cath and Emily, pictured from left, headed to Belper on 6 September to join a protest against the cull. Along with other wildlife lovers from across the North and Midlands, they donned badger masks and facepaint, carried banners and marched through the town. Emily’s article about the protest was subsequently published on Green World website.