



Suffolk Badger and other Mammals Group



Dec 2010

Issue 4



Seasons Greetings!

A Hinchliffe

Special points of interest:

- Suffolk Badger Update
- Plans for AGM 2011
- Dormice on the Doorstep!
- "Members Memories"
- Badgers taking Baths!
- Food for Thought!

While we Humans are filling our stomachs to the brim, spare a thought for our beloved Badgers tucked up (but not hibernating) full of their Autumn banquet. December is the time when an amazing phenomenon occurs. "Delayed implantation" means that although mating can occur virtually any time of the year, the cubs are always born at the same time of the year. The Badger embryo's are implanted in the uterus and the next generation of cubs will be born towards the end of January and during February.



Suffolk Badger Update

Adrian Hinchliffe

Hi all! Its that time of year again when the dark early evenings are lit up with a multitude of festive lights. For many recent years we have had quite mild winters but last year, & this, we have had lots of the festive flakes. Badgers are spending much of their time in the warmth of their setts at this time of year & so thankfully the number of casualties is reduced. Total number of reported casualties is down on last years 209 to 154, but still a high figure.

Incidents this year have been relatively few but one case is still being investigated by the authorities who are taking the matter very seriously. The National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) reported in January: *"The NWCU is in receipt of information regarding "Doughnutting," which is a particular method of poisoning Badgers. Doughnuts are being stuffed with slug pellets & left close to badger setts. Badgers have a sweet tooth & will eat the doughnuts resulting in a slow & unpleasant death. As with other poisoning cases, other animals within the locality are also likely to be affected."*

The incident in Suffolk did not involve doughnuts but other foods such as potatoes, apples & eggs (injected with poison) are other foodstuffs that can & have been used in the past. If you notice any odd powders, empty chemical containers or unusual foods laying near to a sett DO NOT TOUCH them but phone either myself, Suffolk Wildlife Trust or the poisoning hotline FREEPHONE 0800 321 600.

We have a very good relationship with Suffolk Police, who thankfully have two new officers who specialise in Wildlife Crime. People who commit these acts are criminals & should not be approached if seen. It is vitally important that you have gained the landowners permission before surveying & that someone else knows where you are & what time to expect you back. I am now in possession of the latest SWT Volunteer Briefing so if you haven't received one of these & completed your registration form then let me know & I will send these out to you.

As mentioned in the last newsletter two Badgers were lucky enough to be rescued this year - would you be prepared to attend an injured or trapped badger in the middle of the night in Suffolk if you had the equipment and training? If so I would love to hear from you.

This years AGM held at Bradfield Woods & Felsham Village Hall were again very well attended with over 60 people turning up.

Each year various Badger groups organise events not only to publicise "Badger Trust" but also to use it as an opportunity to raise some additional funds, which may well be urgently needed to fight off a cull.

Groups have organised sponsored walks, giving the opportunity to do some sett checking along the way or other ideas include sponsored bike rides, sponsored jogging round, e.g. the local supermarket car park, coffee mornings possibly including the sale of home-made cakes (always popular), table top or boot sales to help to raise funds & clear unwanted but good quality items, or perhaps those with children could involve their class at school? Sponsored silence for the children, or a "dress-down day" for those normally wearing uniforms or perhaps "make a badger hat"?

The date agreed for Badger Day 2011 is Saturday 1st October so this advance warning should give plenty of thinking time for next year. If anyone has any ideas or preferences then please let me know.





As can be seen in the newsletter there were many heart strings tugged in the morning. The woods were filled, not with the sounds of nightingales, but of Human “aaaaaaahs” as each nest box was removed for inspection and found to contain semi torpid Dormice. If you haven’t a license to handle these very cute creatures this was an opportunity not to have been missed. All in all from 235 boxes checked, 70 contained nests and 64 Dormice were sexed, weighed and carefully put back. Well done to the Dormouse team!

The afternoon session kicked off with guest speaker Malcolm Clark with his Mammal sound recordings and recollections of when he and Margaret Grimwade recorded the “Voice of the Badger,” also we heard Margaret’s recordings of Otters in Scotland.

Talking of Margaret, I had a conversation the other day with Heather Excell, who went out in the early 1980’s

TREASURERS THANKS

MARTIN HANCOCK

Special thanks to everyone for your donations to the group, many gave more than the minimum suggested. Also special thanks to Malcolm Clark for donating the proceeds of the sale of his CD at the AGM to the Group funds. It is very much appreciated. If anyone would still like to make a donation please make cheques payable to the “Suffolk Badger Group” and send c/o Suffolk Wildlife Trust at Ashbocking.

with Margaret, checking and recording the first setts in and around Suffolk. Margaret had heard that Heather was interested in Badgers and so made contact, and they became good friends. Scotland was visited and



AHinchliffe

became very special to both ladies. Margaret went on to form the Suffolk Badger group and in Jan 1997 with the help of employees of Eastern Group plc built the Badger Hide (Now renamed in memory of Margaret). This year the hide proved to be very successful with very few occasions where members of public failed to see a Badger. The Hide reopens in April so if you want to see Badgers in comfort now is the time to get those bookings in.



A Hinchliffe

If you have any stories, pictures or release details from the 1980’s onwards I would love to see them and maybe put them in future newsletters. I wish you all, on behalf of the working group a very Happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year!

Adrian

Please don't forget to send in any Suffolk Badger casualty records or sett reports to:
adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk

A new and unexpected population of Dormice, *Muscardinus avellanarius*, were discovered in Suffolk last May, just south of Ipswich, when Eric Patrick, a bird ringer working in Millennium Wood LNR found a single mouse staring back at him from a bird box.

Dormice on the Doorstep - a fantastic wildlife discovery

Margaret Regnault &

Dave Fincham

The Hazel Dormouse is the UK's only native Dormouse, and has a furry tail, golden brown fur and large black eyes. It is a nocturnal animal which spends its waking hours in trees and hedges. In winter these small mammals spend many months hibernating in a woven nest at ground level.

Following rather surprised confirmation of Eric's sighting by licensed Dormouse workers, tubes were placed and surveys carried out over the summer in parts of this woodland and surrounding sites. By October, evidence of a thriving population had emerged

with a maximum count of 12 in a 2ha area surveyed, including ancient woodland (Spring Wood LNR), the 10 year old, largely natural regeneration site of Millennium Wood itself, and the adjoining scrub and hedgerows.

Prior to this discovery, the nearest known population of Dormice was in Bentley Wood, some 2.5km distant, on the other side of the A14, it seems very likely, therefore, that the newly discovered population has been here all along, centred around Spring Wood, and has simply been overlooked. Since they are nocturnal and live only at very low densities even in optimum conditions, this isn't, perhaps, quite as surprising as it may first appear.

Spring Wood and Millennium Wood are owned by Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) and managed by the Greenways Countryside Project. The site used to be a SWT reserve until the late 1990s. No previous records of dormice have been reported from this site, although anecdotal tales of them being in the area, and in local gardens, from earlier decades, are now starting to emerge.



A Hinchliffe

The habitat of these woods is suitable for dormice due to the continued coppicing by volunteers in areas under overhead power lines, together with high canopy in other areas and a restricted amount of deer damage, which in turn is largely because of high numbers of visitors and the presence of the A14 immediately to the south. Millennium wood was partially planted with oak and hazel, but is mostly composed of naturally regenerated woodland. This wood is currently dominated by willow, together with quite a lot of ash – which is certainly not typical dormouse territory. Millennium Wood was originally created to relieve increasing visitor pressure in Spring Wood, due to the encroachment of local housing development.

Both of these sites join with Kiln Meadow – an area of tussocky grassland, young trees and scrub with mature hedgerows also owned by IBC until last month. Despite campaigning by many local conservation organisations, IBC have now sold it for development and at the time of writing the reserved matters planning application is under consideration. Dormice have been found to be resident and breeding in the hedges surrounding this meadow. The effect of any development so close to this population remains to be seen.

In England the dormouse has become extinct in up to 7 counties – half its former range in the past century - so our discovery is especially important.

Have you ever seen a Badger taking a bath?

You have now ! Thanks to Janet Watson



Janet Watson

Have you ever seen any thing quite so funny?

These fantastic images, captured by Janet are simply amazing! You cant help but have anthropomorphic thoughts about what you'd like to think they are saying to each other! Maybe you 'd like send in your captions for the pictures and I will publish some of the funniest? (adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk)



Janet Watson

These images were stills taken from video, there are many different types of device on the market nowadays to capture what comes into your garden & "Gardenature" have very kindly agreed to give our members a 10% discount off any of their wildlife / nestbox camera systems (excluding accessories and other products).

(<http://www.gardenature.co.uk/>)



Question: "I was absolutely amazed last night whilst watching the fox happily eating in my garden when in flew my next door neighbour's tabby cat and chased the fox off three times. Unfortunately the fox did not come back again, hopefully it will return tonight. I would have thought the fox would have gone for the cat - are foxes generally afraid of cats?"

I guess they are if this still taken in my back garden is anything to go by! (AH)



Adrian Hinchliffe



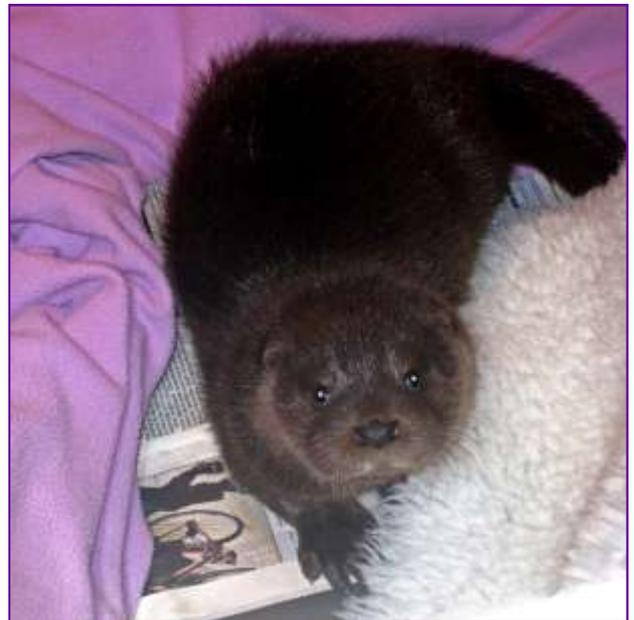
Following an appeal to respond to Defra's recent consultation on the proposed Badger Cull in England, I received the following extracts of an email from

Sheila Taubler

I met Pauline Kidner (founder of Secret World Rescue Center in Somerset) about 14/15 years ago when the animal shelter was mainly a rescue centre for badgers. I was so lucky that day because the keeper was just about to clean out the pen in which they kept their tame badger called Glade and she asked if I would like to go in with her. They had rescued it as a young cub but unfortunately were not able to put it back into the wild. When it grew up a little Pauline used to take it to schools for the children to see. It came running out into the main pen and jumped up on me just as a dog

would when it was happy to see you and I was able to stroke it. It then hared around the pen and kept coming back to me pulling at my sleeve for me to play with it again. I clapped my hands together again and it hared off again. It was one of the most magical moments of my life an experience I will never forget. So you can now see why I was so excited to find a badger visiting my garden.

A couple of years ago, I visited the Centre again not realising that things had changed and they only opened it up to the Public on certain days - this was not one of them. Once again I was so lucky because Pauline asked me if I would like to see a 4 week old otter they had just rescued. She took me into her house and into the kitchen where she had made a cubicle with heating, in which to keep it. It was so cute and she let me take some photos which I am going to attach in a separate e-mail because it will be too much to send through to you in one go. And here are just a couple.



Members Scoop!

Janet Watson & Nick Gibbons

Do you have an interesting story / comment / picture with reference to a mammal? If you could kindly send them in to me then they may well appear in the next edition of the newsletter.

AH (adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk)

Janet sent in this splendid picture of a young cub exploring some pipe work. It is now her screen saver, I can see why!

Continue reading to find out what Nick Gibbons stumbles upon whilst out night jar surveying

Sometimes I get asked why I do not tire of going out looking for Nightjars. I hope the notes below give you some idea why I find it difficult to understand the question.

Nightjar surveys – with a difference!

By Nick Gibbons



In June I spent a number of evenings out & about & two of them I would class as extra special.

On the first evening I went out slightly early as I needed to check on an area prior to dusk to avoid any potential disturbance to ground nesting species of birds. As I was walking across the grassland I was aware of a number of 'humps' in the distant grass. Checking with a small telescope I found that these were not tussocks of grass but feeding badgers. I was able to approach

to less than 100m & then spent half an hour watching the family go about their business, scratching around for grubs and worms.

I then had to move to carry on the bird survey & four of the badgers rapidly disappeared down a single hole that was a new sett for the records. The other two, who were a bit further away, proceeded to an alternate sett where they stood on the earth mound watching my progress across their front. It was great to see them standing at full stretch sniffing the air in an attempt to see what I was in the gathering gloom.

I was then attracted to a distant commotion, with a number of crows making a fuss. A quick reveal revealed a fox being mobbed by half a dozen crows. What was more interesting was the display by a Stone-curlew trying to draw the fox away, doing a classic tumbling act in front of it, before flapping off 15 to 20m or so & repeating the exercise. The fox slowly trotted off seemingly unconcerned and peace returned to the area. It was good to see the crows helping to get rid of the fox but I was left wondering whether that, while the Stone curlew was luring the fox away, one of the crows had not nipped in to rob any nest that was clearly present.

Wandering on I was able to record many deer including Red, Roe, Fallow & Muntjac. The Fallow were mainly the classic Breckland version being very dark and not the lovely fawn & speckled version you see in most mammal books. In addition there was nice white Fallow which stood out well in the gathering gloom. Add to this a number of hares & a few rabbits it was quite a good mammal evening.

To cap it off, as I returned to the car I almost tripped over another badger feeding on the track. It seemed totally unconcerned at my presence &, after the quick initial startle that the encounter gave to both of us, it trotted a few yards away & continued to scratch around feeding. That resulted in a further quarter of an hour watching with the result that it was a very late night!

Oh, & on top of that I had a great view of a pair of Nightjars displaying & feeding, plus another churring in an adjacent block, just to ensure I did not forget why I was out there in the first place.

Two evenings later I had another great encounter in a nearby location. I stopped off on my bird survey to check a sett that I had recorded the previous year. There was a number of new holes, fresh bedding, dung pits & was clearly quite active. I was just moving off when my attention was caught by some rustling in a patch of nettles some 25m away. Standing still I was able to watch a badger collecting fresh bedding. It appeared from the nettles & trotted some 15m before starting to gather up a large ball of dry grass, scratching & pulling it from the tussocky sward. Having gathered a good ball it then hobbled backwards pulling the dry grass back into the nettle patch where I later found a new outlying sett entrance. It made a number of forays in front of me collecting material while I stood stock still watching. In one case, as the dry grass levels were declining, it moved forward pulling what grass it could find & leaving little piles along its route. When it was satisfied it had sufficient for a trip, it started shuffling backwards, carefully collecting up the line of small bundles of grass, along the way. What surprised me is how it always managed to be so precise in finding its way back to the sett whilst walking backwards! I do not think I have stood so still for half an hour in a long time, only lowering my binoculars for a brief moment when the badger was below ground arranging the fresh material.

To add to this I also saw again four species of deer, hare & several Nightjar. So, while the primary objective may be to record Nightjar, it is just such a great time of the day to be out & about with so much happening as the day shift clocks off & the night shift comes on.



Adrian Hinchliffe

Having seen Chris Packham on Autumnwatch raving about the benefits for bats of LED streetlights, I decided to find out more about the effect of lights on their behaviour. Streetlights may make it easier for humans to travel by road, but they could cause a problem for "commuting" bats. According to a report in the journal Current Biology, researchers from Bristol University say that streetlights could cause bats to use longer and less safe routes. The researchers studied the effect with artificial lights along flight routes used by lesser horseshoe bats. The text below was taken from various websites reporting on this research.

Streetlights & Bats

Sue Hooton

"If you want bats to thrive, turn out your streetlights. Scientists have found that woodland bats will do anything to avoid lights when foraging at night, even if it means finding less food or being exposed to predators. Bats have got hard-wired aversion to light and try to avoid it where ever possible. Being forced to take detours could mean that the bats end up in worse feeding grounds or having to fly longer to find what they need. The alternative routes taken by the bats could also provide less shelter, exposing the animals to greater risk of attack by falcons or hawks. Previous research has shown that some species are, in fact, attracted to lights. Especially white mercury vapour lamps that emit a lot of ultraviolet light that attracts insects, the bats come in and feed in the insects. But these are fast-flying bats that fly out in the open. The bats that feed in woodland seem to be light averse and these are the species that usually fly very slowly and are the ones most vulnerable to predation. We really need to know what levels of lighting particular bat species can tolerate, and mitigate appropriately. That could include directing light away from important flight routes or shielding the light in some way."

I had the opportunity to play my part recently when consulted by highways engineer colleagues at Suffolk County Council. I was keen to ensure that the design of street lighting schemes minimise the impact on bats and I thought readers might be interested in knowing more about a recent scheme in Stowmarket.



The first photo shows the white light 'Stela' LED units and although the road is lit very well with good uniformity, Suffolk County Council engineers are pleased that the surrounding properties are in darkness and that the light is concentrated where it is required. The second picture shows the far end of the road that did not get new LED lighting and shows a bright harsh orange light with properties lit up. If you follow this link <http://www.wrtl.co.uk/product-range/road-andamenity/stela> you can download the 'Stela' lantern information if you're interested. It looks like the new LED streetlights maintain a dark corridor although it would be good to know if they enable bats to navigate their way through sub-urban gardens. Different species of bats feed in different ways but let's hope that those in the Stowmarket area can now find prey in the dark that has not been drawn to the lights!

Two Mile Bottom Hibernacula

At the end of the summer an additional larger air vent was fitted to the hibernaculum by the Forestry Commission with advice from the Suffolk Bat Group to try and improve air flow through the system. A single vent



was installed on the shorter of the tunnels at the beginning of September 2010. At a check recently the vent certainly appeared to be working with a noticeable difference between the short and long tunnels being observed. During the check a record high count of 18 Daubenton's bats were noted already in residence. The temperature levels are being continuously monitored and next spring these will be analysed and a larger vent may be installed in the longer tunnel.



There is a new book in the New Naturalist series called *“Badger”* by Professor Timothy Roper. Not cheap at £30 in soft back but much cheaper than going to the pub – and an excellent read. It will keep you occupied for hours.

Food for Thought

Richard Woolnough



Because of the health and economic issues associated with TB in badgers and the need to find solutions, they are probably one of the best studied mammals in the world. However just because you know a lot it does not necessarily mean you understand everything. Prof. Roper spends a certain amount of space suggesting that Hans Kruuk in his book *“The Social Badger”* had put too much emphasis on food and not enough on sex. My wife when forced to discuss the intimate details of the various factors affecting badger behaviour asserted that “you can have sex anywhere but you cannot find food anywhere!”

The impact of food on behaviour can best be illustrated in the Otter. Otters feeding in freshwater are almost completely nocturnal but those on the west coast of Scotland feeding in salt water, exactly the same species, hunt during the day. Nothing to do with disturbance it is because of the way that fish behave.

In this new book we have the results of a study on Badgers in the Bialowieza Forest in Poland. This is reckoned to be the nearest we have to primeval forest with all the large predators such as wolf, bear and lynx still present. So the best indication of how badgers lived before humans affected the countryside in such a dramatic way. A study had 70% of their diet as earthworms. The same sort of proportion as the Badgers living in the worm rich pastures of West Country in England. However there the similarities end. In the Polish Forest the ranges are 20 times larger than in this country (1200 hectares against 60) and in these massive territories in the Bialowieza Forest there are only one adult male and one adult female and their dependent cubs. In a study at Woodchester Park in Gloucs where the feeding was particularly good the territories were as small as 30 hectares but the number of adult badgers within the area was regularly above 12 and in one case there were 35 badgers in one territory of which 30 were adults or over a year old. So the smaller the territory the more badgers there are? Furthermore in the majority of areas in this country there is very intensive territorial behaviour with dung pits around the boundaries and fights commonly recorded. In the Forest the range boundaries are not defended presumably because they are much too long and would require too much effort to defend.



So, the food is the same but the quantity available leads to a very different social structure and behaviour. **There is so much more to ponder over and I certainly do not agree with all Professor Roper’s conclusions** but if you are serious about badgers you must have this book in your library. You will also need Hans Kruuk’s *“The Social Badger”* and *“Badgers”* by Ernest Neal and Chris Cheeseman in the book case as well, and still you will have questions.



We are already looking for ideas for our next AGM venue and one topic that has been raised is Marine Mammals. Don't forget if you have a preference for a location or a species of mammal that you think would be of interest for the whole group then please let us know.

The Mammals of Suffolk

By Simone Bullion



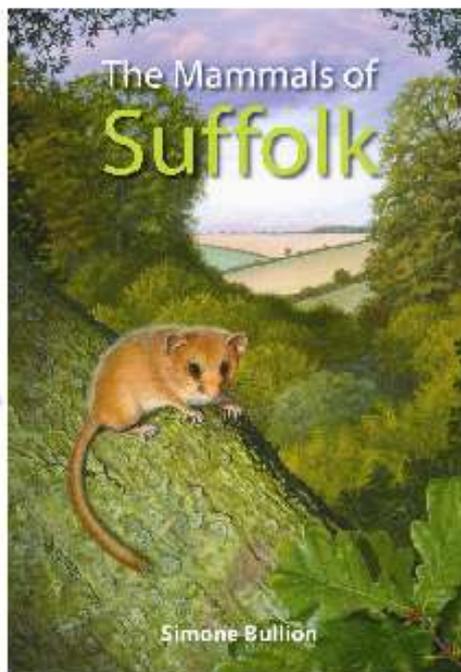
A wonderful Christmas present for wildlife enthusiasts!



Suffolk Naturalists' Society

A comprehensive, illustrated account of the status and history of mammals in the county of Suffolk

Normally £20
now £12



All proceeds go to Suffolk Wildlife Trust & the Suffolk Naturalists' Society

Discounted price (+ £3.50p&p) until the end of January 2011

Discounted copies are available at Lackford Lakes, Redgrave and Lopham Fen and Brooke House, or alternatively send a cheque to Brooke House made payable to 'SWT trading limited', purchase over the phone using a debit/credit card on 01473 890089 quoting 'book offer' or go to the online shop at www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org clicking on the 'members offer' link.

