# Suffolk Badger and other Mammals Group

Suffolk Wildlife Trust

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Issue 6

## Porpoise Predator Perplexity

Can you help solve the mystery? During February & March of this year, Porpoise's (*Phocoena phocoena)* with chunks bitten out of them were washed up on the East coast, raising fears of large predators in our coastal waters around Norfolk & Suffolk.

First, a mutilated Porpoise with bite marks, was found along the beach at Covehithe, & then within a few days another was washed up at Overstrand near Cromer.

At Winterton, Great Yarmouth, remains of another Porpoise , were found, this time with savage bite marks suggesting it could have been mauled by a Great White shark or killer whale.

Again, days later, another 5ft porpoise was found, with chunks taken out of its head & tail, on the beach two miles away at Horsey. All four of the remains were washed up within the space of about a month.

R Woolnough

Reports at the time from National shark expert Dr Ken Collins, who runs a shark-tagging programme at the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, suggested that the porpoises had 'undoubtedly' suffered shark bites and could have been attacked by a Shortfin Mako shark. He said: "There is no obvious damage of the kind that occurs if a porpoise has been caught up in fishing gear." However, "It is not clear whether it was killed by a shark or a shark was scavenging on a dead porpoise."

In the last few weeks another 4 Porpoises have been washed up at Covehithe, Benacre & Walberswick.

A local naturalist from Great Yarmouth said he believed a killer whale was the more likely explanation, 'this kind of attack is unusual for our region...they will attack porpoises & seals.'

On the shores of Aberdeenshire, several years ago, it was discovered that the porpoises washed up dead had been killed by bottlenose dolphins. Dolphins are very effective predators and have been spotted in our coastal waters in recent years. They would certainly seem to be more common than Great Whites or Killer Whales, which are very rarely found in the Southern North Sea.

A Hinchliffe

During May 2005 along the Belgian coast, 16 Porpoises were washed ashore giving rise for concern on the species conservation status. Two had been cut open ventrally, clearly indicating they had been caught in fishing gear. Bycatch was the most probable cause of death of all the other porpoises. Certainly two porpoises have been known to have been cut out of nets in recent weeks off our coasts. What is the scale of this activity & at what consequence?

During 2010 there was a string of mystery deaths of grey and common seals which suffered huge spiral injuries off the north Norfolk coast. In a report by the Seal Mammal Research Unit, they concluded that the "most likely cause of death for the seals from the UK is associated with the seals being drawn through a ducted (or cowled) propeller, such as a fixed Kort or Rice nozzle or a ducted azimuth thruster."

The mystery continues - do we have a natural predator off Suffolk's coast, or is it man, or man made that is harming these animals– if so why? Please do keep those reports of any cetaceans coming in, DEAD or ALIVE!

## Special Points of interest:

# AGM 2011

Fantastic weather greeted all those who attended this years AGM, hosted very kindly by Mr Charles Lofts at Playford Mere. Mr Lofts very kindly allowed our group access to this amazing piece of Suffolk landscape and his love of the countryside and its wildlife clearly shone through as brightly as the sun!

One lucky member even spotted an Otter which he very nearly overlooked as a floating log, until its tail flipped up upon diving!

The afternoon's speakers commenced at the SWT's Foxburrow Farm with Dr Simone Bullion sending us nuts - to identify which mammals had been feeding on them & educating us on what signs to look out for.

If you have any suggestions for topics, locations or speakers for next years AGM please do get in contact.
Many Thanks to all those volunteers who made the day so enjoyable.

## *Useful Numbers*

To report the suspected poisoning of wildlife or pets call:
FREEPHONE 0800 321 600

## Otter Surveying in Suffolk

With the announcement of the 2010 National Otter survey results indicating a healthy comeback, Surveys will continue to be carried out in order to keep a check on their progress within Suffolk. If you are interested in being trained & being part of the team to record their activity please contact Trudy Seagon or Penny Hemphill via the SWT at Ashbocking 01473 890089.

## Fascinating Otter Facts? - Hans Kruuk

"Otters spraint near trees, as dogs use lamp posts"

"Otters tend to spraint on vantage points or other striking objects for instance on the top of prominent rocks along the water's edge, under bridges, near trees or at the junctions of tributaries…they are often conspicuous & otters really go well out of their way to deposit a spraint on a prominent point. A spraint is so small that an otter will have to produce many of them each day to satisfy the function of the elimination of food remains. These observations imply that spraints have another purpose probably scent communication."

"About 10 times more spraint can be found in winter than during summer"

"Male otters produce the smallest spraint; females next; & cubs the largest."

# *Suffolk Badger Update - Adrian Hinchliffe*

On 14th Dec, Caroline Spelman, the Environment Minister, announced the go ahead for two 6 week trials to shoot 70% of free running Badgers in those areas. "It is hoped to reduce Bovine TB by 16%"

David Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust said: "We are clearly very disappointed by this decision but now that it has been made, we will be studying it with our legal advisors to determine what action we shall take."

This announcement was made just after Defra had announced its new National Badger Survey of GB. The last one was completed in 1997 after an earlier one in the mid 1980's. The survey, to be carried out between now and 2013, is to address its obligations under the Bern Convention now a cull has been decided upon. How else can you kill 70% of Badgers in an area if you have no idea on numbers before hand?

In Suffolk, numbers and densities of Badgers & cattle are not in the same league as the South West. Providing cattle movements continue to ensure that Bovine TB is not brought into the county from high incidence areas, then long may we stay clear of this disease. Defra are now looking at restricting Camelid movements as they too are known to be carriers of the disease and currently have no restrictions on movement around the country.

This year we have seen several badgers reported being injured unfortunately many did not survive but thankfully after Alec Suttenwood's determination 1 badger from Lavenham did make it - Well done Alec (see story later)

I had some interesting photographs of badgers sent in this year, especially one of "Porridge" who visited Nathalie's Garden to feed from a chicken hopper. Unfortunately Nathalie's excitement of seeing and watching the badger turned to shock and utter distress as "Porridge" was no longer content with the chicken feed but attacked the chickens killing all bar 2. Thankfully measures have been put in place and to date no more attacks have taken place although the remaining

Suffolk Badger Update (cont')

chickens have "good memories and will not go in the coop at night. They jump up onto our 6ft fence and when they are asleep, we have to put them to bed!"

Nathalie Hooper

Thankfully Nathalie took advice from the Suffolk Badger Group and has dealt with her problem. Earlier in the year however I had some gruesome pictures arrive showing the effects of snares (unknown whether legal or illegal unfortunately) Fox's and at least 2 Badgers had been snared and clearly been in trauma for some time looking at the chewed sticks and scraped earth, before the wire finally ended the creatures lives. I hate Snares! They are indiscriminate and fail to distinguish between cats, dogs, badgers or their intended quarry.

On a happier note WE HAD CUBS AT THE BADGER HIDE! For the first time in several years people had fantastic views of up to 4 fluffed up, bouncing "Humbugs." Carole from the SWT has eagerly enrolled the help of several of our dedicated members to feed at the hide on a rota basis throughout the winter, so book now to see what excitement 2012 will bring - thank you Carole and all those helping out.

The group has now got a "Facebook" page so if this appeals "Like" us and you will receive updates and can join in discussions.

Lastly on behalf of all the "Working Group" I would like to wish all members a very

Happy Christmas!

## Report from Badger Trust Conference 2011

This Years Conference hosted by S. Yorkshire Badger Group, highlighted an increasing trend in "Wildlife Crime."

The Poem "Badger" should be a thing of the past but it was highlighted that such activities are still very much alive. Warnings were given saying that if you live in areas with abundant wildlife then those areas will at some point be a target. Criminals are not worried about mileage. This applies to Hare coursing, Deer & Fish poaching, Badger digging, baiting & poisoning as well as lamping with dogs.

If you suspect a crime call the police with any details such as car registrations etc but do not confront this criminals they may be armed and dangerous.

## Badger

When midnight comes a host of dogs and men
Go out and track the badger to his den,
And put a sack within the hole, and lie
Till the old grunting badger passes by.
He comes an hears - they let the strongest loose.
The old fox gears the noise and drops the goose.
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry,
And the old hare half wounded buzzes by.
They get a forked stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town,
And bait him all the day with many dogs,
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs.
He runs along and bites at all he meets:
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets.

He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door.
The frequent stone is hurled where'er they go;
When badgers fight, then everyone's a foe.
The dogs are clapped and urged to join the fray'
The badger turns and drives them all away.
Though scarcely half as big, demure and small,
He fights with dogs for hours and beats them all.
The heavy mastiff, savage in the fray,
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away.
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold,
The badger grins and never leaves his hold.
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels
And bites them through - the drunkard swears and reels

The frighted women take the boys away,
The blackguard laughs and hurries on the fray.
He tries to reach the woods, and awkward race,
But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chase.
He turns again and drives the noisy crowd
And beats the many dogs in noises loud.
He drives away and beats them every one,
And then they loose them all and set them on.
He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men,
Then starts and grins and drives the crowd again;
Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
And leaves his hold and crackles, groans, and dies.

John Clare (1793 - 1864)

# Remote Camera, Action!



Suffolk Badger Groups' remote camera device, supplied by Gardenature, has been already well used monitoring 2 injured badgers in rehab. Sometimes we get complaints about "our" badgers digging in peoples gardens. They do this as they forage, especially during dry periods in the year, but sometimes the Badger is not the culprit & the remote camera is a useful tool to help prove either way.

gardenature
WILDLIFE CAMERA SYSTEMS

Several of our members benefited a 10% discount off selected wildlife / nestbox camera systems (excluding accessories and other prodcts).

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

A 1 legged Juvenile Moorhen & a well fed Water Vole taken at Playford Mere using the Prostalk Camera.

## Lavenham Rescue - Alec Suttenwood

After receiving a call for an unconscious badger just outside Lavenham, Alec Suttenwood was asked to attend. Alec met "China" who had moved the badger out of the road & phoned us, & proceeded to tend its injuries. However, as is often the case the badger withdrew into itself. Aided with honey, a stick and a few raw eggs, the badger eventually perked up and started to eat and gain weight. After 4 weeks Alec finally gave "China" a call to attend its release. However the badger did not want to leave and had to be unceremoniously upended out of its cage before realising it was free to go. It trundled off into the undergrowth pausing for a moment, looked behind and then disappeared. There were 3 very large grins! Job Well done!

## Mammal Survey Day

### Haverhill Area

Looking for signs of badgers, otters, water voles and any other mammals we can find. Working in small groups with an experienced leader and then meeting up to compare finds

A feast of prints and poo!

Sunday 5th February
10.00am until 3.30pm.

Just let Adrian know if you are interested and we will confirm meeting place and shared transport arrangements where possible

# Members Scoop!

Do you have an interesting story / comment / picture with reference to any mammal? Send them in to me for possible inclusion in future editions of our newsletter. AH

## Badger watch at Caerlaverock

Nick Gibbons

Having just spent a few days at Caerlaverock WWT reserve, it was a great place to spend the evening watching badgers from the conservatory of the farmhouse. This is a great bonus for stopping in the accommodation there.

The warden puts out nuts under a variety of guises such as two bricks with peanuts in the frog of the lower one, and under larger stones. He also smears some honey on the branches of some large logs behind the blocks.

On our first night the first animal that arrived was a young vixen. She was particularly interested in the honey and made a good meal of it before looking for the nuts. Clearly this was not a first visit as she adeptly took the top brick off one of the pairs to reveal the peanuts below. Ten minutes after the vixen had arrived our first badger turned up, quite small and probably last years young. This animal was quite nervous and although prodding the bricks with its snout it did not seem able to know how to push the top brick off. The badger and fox then circulated around the site neither seeming quite sure of the other. The badger then decided to go and eat the peanuts off the brick the vixen had turned over while the vixen went and turned over another brick and ate those.

Soon a second juvenile badger appeared followed by a much larger adult. The vixen decided that enough was enough at this stage and left. The adult badger was able to tackle the larger stone and pushed it aside to get at the nuts underneath. With all the nuts gone from the bricks the second young badger then managed to push the adult away from the block to get at the remaining nuts and the adult left the scene. The first juvenile made vain attempts to get some of the nuts but was fended off very successfully and eventually gave up the fight. As someone puts it, they looked like a couple of kids scrapping over a toy!

The following morning while walking round the site we kept an eye out for any setts and quickly identified two that were in use some 300m apart. They were dug in the banks of the reserve pathways and were readily spotted.

On our second evening something had had a go at the available food in daylight as two of the sets of bricks were turned over and eaten and a third had been turned over but the nuts left. The first arrival we saw was a nervous juvenile badger which soon left without tackling any of the nuts or honey. Soon a larger animal arrived that was clearly identified by some light stripes on its flanks and also some bald areas above the tail which looked like it had been in a fight. A second small badger arrived, and again pushed the adult off the easy to get to nuts within the bricks. The adult partially pushed the larger rock aside and started to eat these without disturbance. Having finished most the nuts on the bricks the juvenile then managed to push the adult away from the larger block and the adult left. The juvenile was not strong enough to push the block off the remaining nuts underneath but in a determined manner proceeded to dig a hole alongside the block to get to them. It then finished off the nuts off the bricks and left.

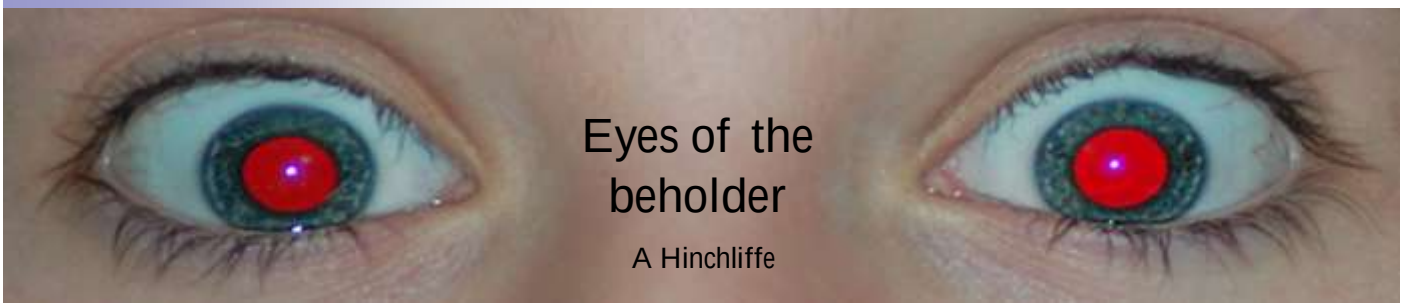
On our final evening we only had a single visitor which was the well marked adult from the previous night and so he had a real feast, eating all the peanuts but leaving the honey.

It was certainly better than watching television!


## Feral Ferrets? - Richard Woolnough

I was lighting the woodburner early the other morning with the Daily Telegraph when I caught sight of a headline ***"It's grim down South for ferrets."*** It stated that *"a rescue centre has been overrun by abandoned ferrets because the archetypal Northern rodent is an increasingly "trendy" pet."* Really they said it's a rodent….and then they told me that "*the RSPCA in Martlesham, Suffolk, said it received an unusually high number of strays this year".* Is that the same as being overrun? Anyway it got me thinking about whether ferrets are living in the countryside without any human assistance or whether they are really abandoned. Domestic cats do not seem to be able to exist without human support in this Country although they are a terrible pest in New Zealand for example. Of course the ferret's close relative the polecat is now making a comeback and that has no problem with surviving without our help.

N.B. The D.T. is excellent for lighting fires but not convinced by its primary purpose but I get them from the mother-in-law!



# Eyes of the beholder

A Hinchliffe

After a brief comment by Suffolk Badger Group Chairman, Richard Woolnough at this year's AGM to Dr Simone Bullion about the colour of an animals eyes at night, I thought I would do some research.

A Mammals eye can contain two types of receptor, known as "Rods" and "Cones." The number of receptors per square millimetre determines the accuracy to distinguish individual objects at a distance. Humans have approximately 200,000/mm2 whereas a Buzzard has 1,000,000/mm2!

"Rods" are better for night vision as they are sensitive to small amounts of light. The number of Rods connected to a single nerve cell increases the sensitivity but reduces its definition making it look blurred. Some Nocturnal animals have mainly Rods in their retina giving them excellent night vision as in the Badger.

"Cones" on the other hand are what allow us to distinguish between different colours of light. There can be as few as one or two cones per nerve cell which makes it great for detail but lacks sensitivity but this is good during daylight. Different pigmented cones detect different colours and so even within the same species, lacking some pigments can mean a kind of colour blindness.

It follows that animals adapted to different ways of life use varying combinations of Rods and Cones. Also, to bridge the gap between night and day, eyes contain a mechanism called an "Iris" which is an involuntary circular sheet of muscle which controls its diameter to allow more light entering the eye onto the sensitive retina at night and less during daylight. Nocturnal animals tend to be able to open their "Iris's" aka "Pupils" much larger than us.

Primarily nocturnal animals can also have a special organ located just behind the retina called a "Tapetum lucidum." This layer of cells reflects light back through the light sensitive area of the retina giving a second chance to detect light. It is this tapetum which gives a reflected light or "eyeshine" when an animal is caught in the headlights of a car or torch. Some fish reflect a white light, Cats a yellow light, Rodents & Birds red and seal and Otters can be Orange. However, because eyeshine is a form of iridescence, the color varies slightly with the angle at which it is seen & the color of the source light.

Humans do not have a tapetum. "Red eye" in photographs is caused by the lack of a tapetum with the light illuminating the blood vessels at the back of the eye whilst the iris is open wider. The amount of redness reflected back is increased dependant on the amount of Melanin contained in the layers behind the retina – blue eyes have greater amounts.

Being a predator, attention to detail, such as distance and movement is also aided by having eyes that overlap their vision (binocular) i.e. eyes located to the front of their heads rather than on the side. This gives a 3D image that can be processed by the brain. With other animals it is better to have eyes with a wider field of view simply to detect the predator as soon as possible.

Focussing of an object has also been adapted by different species. An animal with its head to the ground feeding for instance uses an irregular shaped eye, so that light entering the focusing lens hits the retina at a different angle from the horizon, than that of the ground which passes through the lens at a different length. This enables both images to be sharp at the same time. We on the other hand have muscles attached to the lens which distorts it and varies the angle of refracted light to move the point of focus.

Please send in any Suffolk Badger casualty records or sett reports to Adrian Hinchliffe via: adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk