

2017 PCC Report on Wildlife Crime in Derbyshire

That specifically relating to Badgers – from the Derbyshire Badger Groups

The three Derbyshire badger groups, South Derbyshire, Mid Derbyshire and High Peak Badger Group have the greatest experience in dealing with badger issues within the county, making them the 'go-to' organisation and best point of contact for anyone with concerns relating to badgers and their setts in Derbyshire. A wealth of practical experience has been gained over the past 30 years spent dealing with almost every conceivable issue involving badgers. We respond to calls for help and advice received both directly from the public and referred to us by the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Badger Trust and on occasions the Police and RSPCA. We co-ordinate our efforts, working in close co-operation with one another, each dealing with any issues relating to badgers in our part of the county.

At the end of last year the Mid Derbyshire Badger Group were consulted after problems came to light when damage occurred to a sett during work in progress by a utilities company. We were able to offer advice as the incident was investigated by Derbyshire Constabulary Wildlife officers and the SOCCO team. A file on the incident has been prepared and I believe, is presently in the hands of the Crown Prosecution Service. We were grateful for the prompt response, which shed light on the full extent of the incident and was able to prevent further damage occurring.

There appears to have been fewer incidents of persecution against badgers reported, crimes such as lamping and badger digging, although we are aware that lamping continues as a recreational pursuit. The successful prosecutions following incidents at Unstone and Beeley will have had an effect, demonstrating that such crimes will not be tolerated in Derbyshire. A serious issue of badger persecution on an estate in the High Peak Badger Group area has recently come to light. The Group are reassured that it is presently under investigation by the recently formed Police Wildlife and Rural Crime Team, which is a most welcome new initiative by our Derbyshire police. The role of Liz Hadfield is also appreciated. Wildlife persecution on shooting estates is a growing concern, increasingly expressed by the public.

One aspect of our involvement with badgers is being increasingly tested. It is that relating to land development issues. The latest presumption in favour of development arising from changes to the planning laws has brought about a massive increase in new and often quite large scale housing developments. This has brought about great change, especially in rural communities and Derbyshire has seen its share. Green-field sites are seen as attractive propositions for developers. Many, possibly the majority of these, by their very nature have impinged on badger habitat and setts. This has exercised the Mid Derbyshire group greatly over recent years and also the South Derbyshire Group. Many schemes are coming to fruition at the present time and we are at times inundated with requests for advice and assistance from concerned local residents. We work in close co-operation with the

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in that regard and in many cases co-ordinate our response to dealing with the issues that arise. In some instances we have also been able to liaise with consultancies brought in to deal with the presence of a protected species. Their proliferation as opportunities increase can, with some, lead to a lowering of standards. If issues arise, this is an area where our expertise can be called upon. There have been a few occasions where assistance from a wildlife officer has been sought. Wherever possible, we have sought to rectify incorrect evaluations of badger presence and activity.

Problems of illegal sett interference by a landowner, the hunt or a farmer can arise, including blocking and slurring. We have been grateful for the involvement of wildlife officers in dealing with such incidents. In Mid Derbyshire it also led to helpful discussions between police and the Derbyshire County Council Ecologist Tom French after a landowner had infringed land use regulations and in the process a sett had been destroyed.

The groups continue to respond to urgent calls for attention to live casualty badgers, to which we accept calls for help around the clock. The majority though not all will have been involved in collisions with traffic. We have specialist equipment and experience in dealing with such calls and those received by the police are immediately referred to us. We regularly work with vets in that regard. If snaring incidents occur where a live badger is involved we should always be called to assist immediately.

The highly contentious issue of badger culling to combat bovine TB in cattle has become intensely politicised and is no longer a debate about the veracity or implications of the science, which have become irrelevant as the dogged pursuit of a cull policy in parts of the country continues. The scientific arguments have been extremely well aired over the past few years. Considerable effort continues to be expended in an attempt to convince government of their grave error of judgement, which has undeniably led to an increase in nefarious crimes against badgers nationally.

Derbyshire's excellent co-ordinated badger vaccination programme, overseen by Debbie Bailey, Director of the Badger Trust and member of the High Peak Badger Group, on behalf of the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and National Trust in Derbyshire, has overcome last year's problems with availability of vaccine. Her team of lay-vaccinators includes members of all three badger groups. Police have been supportive and assisted when a trap was stolen.

The National Trust stance is "no culling on their land" and the DCC maintains its strong stance against culling, which is set to continue in Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Devon/Cornwall and now also Warwickshire, and Cheshire.

We applaud the Derbyshire Constabulary for its highly regarded initiative in the training and teamwork of its Wildlife Officers, a highly regarded and invaluable asset in effectively addressing the ever present threat of wildlife crime within our county.