

Gloucestershire Badger Group Newsletter

Summer 2023



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In this edition, we'll be introducing the new committee members, updating you on the group's sett-surveying and fieldwork activities, giving advice on supporting wildlife throughout the summer months, publicising future events and discussing the supplementary badger cull now in force in large parts of Gloucestershire. Plus, we have a NEW WEBSITE!

1. AGM, APRIL 30TH 2023 - STRATTON VILLAGE HALL

Thank you to all who attended our AGM, during which we officially became GLOUCESTERSHIRE BADGER GROUP and saw the election of a new committee. The team is now made up of:

Karen Wilson – Chair

chair@gloucestershirebadgergroup.org

Mike Cheeseman – Treasurer

treasurer@gloucestershirebadgergroup.org

Jackie Rodway – Secretary & Memberships

secretary@gloucestershirebadgergroup.org
memberships@gloucestershirebadgergroup.org

Cheryl Dyke & Madison Harrington – Field Officers

fieldofficer@gloucestershirebadgergroup.org



We are all working hard to get the group up and running as effectively as possible so we can take on the challenges facing our beloved badgers.

2. NEW GLOUCESTERSHIRE BADGER GROUP WEBSITE

We're excited to announce the launch of our brand-new website, courtesy of Mike who has been working flat out on this for the last few months. There are some stunning and inspirational graphics (badgers are SO photogenic) and lots of useful information about badgers, the cull, badger crime and persecution, and the impact of housing developments, as well as what we can do about it. There'll also be a round-up of badger-related news and an events diary with details of training days, fundraising activities and social events.

Check it out and let us know what you think: <https://gloucestershirebadgergroup.org/>

We've also created new social media pages to create an online community for our members to see what we've been up to. Find us on both Facebook and Instagram and give us a 'Like'.

3. NATIONAL BADGER TRUST NEWS

Badger Trust is launching its 2023 END THE CULL campaign as badger setts across England stand empty for the first time in history. Kill figures released by the government reveal the cull has claimed over 210,000 badgers – up to half of Britain's estimated badger population.



Figure 1: Badger Trust: End the Cull 2023

The Badger Trust has also heard that the government intends to hold a consultation on epidemiological culling- i.e., culling, based on epidemiological data, that will take place AFTER the supposed end of culling in 2025. If you remember, in 2021 the government announced an end to culling, stating no new intensive badger culling licences would be issued after 2022 and that supplementary culling licences would be restricted to a maximum of two years. HOWEVER, culling would remain an option, and be licenced by Natural England, where they felt epidemiological assessment indicated it was needed. In other words, the door has been left open for continued culling.

“LOBBY YOUR MP” EVENT, 12th July – Houses of Parliament

The Badger Trust has arranged a lobby of parliament on Wednesday 12th July to draw MPs’ attention to the ongoing badger cull and Natural England’s plans to extend it. This entails BT members contacting their MPs in advance and arranging to meet them in Parliament on the same day.

Badger Trust is urging members to:

- send a letter to invite their MP to the lobby event.
- ask MPs to come to a pre-arranged meeting in the Houses of Parliament on 12th July at 14.30pm to listen to concerns about the badger cull.

**For more details and to sign up, visit the Badger Trust website.*

4. OUT AND ABOUT – SETT-SURVEYING UPDATE



1. WOODLAND SETTS

June 1st marked the beginning of the supplementary cull in parts of Gloucestershire and two of our members decided to mark the occasion by going to visit a much-targeted sett. Situated in arguably one of the most beautiful parts of Gloucestershire, these badgers should be enjoying a safe and peaceful existence in a quiet wooded valley. Sadly, they have been mercilessly persecuted in this “haven” since the advent of the cull, with our badger protectors encountering shooters firing across public footpaths in their bid to reduce the badger population there.

Figure 2: Active sett entrance

Miraculously, the main sett in this area was looking extremely active on this most recent visit, with several large and very fresh spoil heaps at many entrances. The presence of latrines close to the sett a few months back, and evidence of bedding “out to air”, had suggested cubs might well be a feature of this clan this year. Let’s hope some, if not all, survive into adulthood.

The picture across some setts in the Cirencester area is more mixed. Surveyors visited a sett in North Cirencester, which once again appears to have been abandoned after a brief interval of habitation. Formerly located in cool bluebell woods with a canopy of broad-leaved trees including some tremendous hybrid poplars, the sett is now more exposed and hard-baked following extensive tree-felling and logging the other side of the public footpath. The removal of a swathe of woodland, which acted as a windbreak, resulted in a winter storm bringing down several remaining smaller trees over the sett itself. The area is now unrecognisable from its former glory and the badgers, whilst briefly re-occupying their home for a few months, have decided to up sticks again.

Another sett a few miles away, also subjected to tree-felling, appears to be clinging on. Formerly heavily targeted in the early days of the cull, it later became a favourite to block by the local hunt. With 7-8 entrances of this once large sett remaining, it seems that fewer than three may now be in use.

These two examples show how culling is interacting with other factors such as tree-felling and climate-change to make existence even more perilous for our badgers.



Figure 3:Glospol signage at site of tree-felling near sett

2. SETTS NEAR FARMS



Figure 4: Badger run through wood

It’s to be expected that any setts situated in the vicinity of a farm, particularly a dairy farm, are more vulnerable to the impact of the cull, so it came as no great surprise for sett-checkers to find no sign of badger life in one part of the Stonehouse area where setts had been recorded in the past. Some setts had disappeared without trace, and others were no longer active. It is nevertheless always very upsetting to find a complete absence of badgers in an area once full of them. There is a slim hope that any badgers have moved out for the summer, as the terrain had become hard-baked and dry with few sources of food or indeed water for any animals at all. The soil in this area is of a heavy, clay type, which is not a favourite of badgers, and several of the fields had been planted with oilseed rape. It is important to keep re-checking setts that you know of, as badgers do have winter and summer homes and may well return to a sett after an absence of a few months.

Another sett-checker returned to an area once full of active setts to find one completely inactive and another very much less active than last summer. It looked like some badgers had dispersed from the main sett for some reason, and taken up occupancy in several outliers. This is another farming area which, we understand, has heavily invested in culling over the last few years.

These recent visits to some of our Gloucestershire setts do show that things are becoming increasingly difficult for badgers in this region. It certainly seems that the cull has had a significant effect on badger numbers, and that the extreme weather we are regularly experiencing is creating additional problems to all wildlife, not least badgers.



Figure 5: Entrance collapsed by cows

If you feel moved by these reports to take action, please do get in touch with our group. We can suggest several ways for you to get involved, depending on your circumstances and time constraints. We can give advice and information on sett-checking, support-feeding and how to join any local patrols which might be operating.

5. BADGER CUB RESCUE

An unfortunate badger cub, which had been caught up round the neck in agricultural sacking, has been successfully released back at her sett following treatment, rest and rehabilitation courtesy of RSPCA Oak and Furrows based in Cricklade.

A team of volunteers from GBG responded to a call from a kind member of the public near Dursley who had heard the distressing cries and seen the cub snarled up tight in a bramble patch. Five other badgers were seen trying to coax the cub back to the sett.

On arrival, one volunteer, experienced at handling badgers, managed to navigate the steep terrain and cut away the material but the little cub did not disappear back down the sett as hoped. Instead, she limped her way to a tree and curled up. As the site was near a footpath used by dogwalkers and there were fears for the traumatised cub's safety and health, the decision was taken to have her assessed by Oak and Furrows.



Figure 6: Cub after cutting away debris

After a few days at the wildlife hospital, she was restored to full health, with the graze round her neck healed and no sign of further injuries. She was released back home by two volunteers from Oak and Furrows and the original team from GBG. We all wish her well!! A Big thanks to RSPCA Oak & Furrows Wildlife Rescue.

*****If you come across a badger in distress, DON'T try to move it yourself but please contact one of Gloucestershire Badger Group's Field Officers on 07752754097 with the most accurate directions or coordinates you can manage – the free app What3Words is very good for this.**

6. CHARLTON KINGS SUMMER FAIR

We had a great public engagement opportunity at the Charlton Kings Summer Fair on Saturday June 17th. The children particularly enjoyed the Badger Adventure Trail with Professor Brock and 3D badger sett. If you would like GBG to hold an assembly about badgers at your school, please get in touch as we'd love to incorporate more of this outreach into our education and conservation work.



Figure 7: Charlton Kings Summer Fair

7. HELPING BADGERS DURING TIMES OF DROUGHT



Figure 8: UK Wildlife Cam

Already this summer, we've seen unprecedented weather with extreme heat and very little rain. Wildlife is struggling to find food and water. *Did you know 90% of a badger's diet is earthworms?* There have been many reports of dehydrated and suffering badgers. Please put water out for wildlife and take some to your local sett if possible. Badgers will also appreciate cut up bits of fruit such as apple, pear or banana. *****PLEASE do not leave out peanuts or sweetcorn to badgers believed to be affected by the cull.*****

8. GBG EVENTS DIARY

Vale Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Open Day – 2nd July 11:00-16:00, Beckford GL20 7AN

Badger Rescue Training - 6th August 13:00-16:00, Stratton Village Hall GL7 2NG ***Free to members***

Badger Crime Training - 25th November, location and time TBD ***Free to members***

9. THE BADGER CULL

This year is the 11th year of the badger cull. 1st June marks the start of 'open season' and badger culling in England. Wales and Scotland do not have a national badger cull.

Gloucestershire has **three** active culling areas, two of which are *supplementary zones*.

12,048 badgers have been killed in Gloucestershire since the cull began in 2013.



Figure 9: Badger Trust

What is ‘supplementary’ culling?

The original cull area (area 1) in West Gloucestershire, began in September 2013 and finally ended after 9 years of intensive badger culling on 31st January 2022. There are still three operating cull areas in Gloucestershire, with five additional areas encroaching county lines.

Gloucestershire Cull Area	Years of culling thus far	Years of culling remaining
Area 9 (North Cotswold)	7	2
Area 29 (Stroud)	5	1
Area 46 (Forest of Dean)	2	2*

*Two years remain on the current licence for Area 46. An additional 2-year supplementary licence can be applied for after the current licence finishes in 2024.

Figure 10: Gloucestershire Badger Group

Following the first four years of intensive badger culling, an area can apply for a supplementary cull licence. These licences before 2021 were valid for five years but have since been limited to two years.

When does the badger cull start?



Figure 11: Cage set to trap found in zone 29

Areas with a supplementary cull licence can begin cage-trapping and free-shooting from 1 June – 30 November. Free-shooting can carry on until 31 January. In June, badger cubs are just starting to explore their territories and venture further than the sett and sows are still lactating.

Areas within their first four years of culling (‘intensive badger cull licence’) have specified start and end dates and should not carry on for more than 6-weeks. These licence dates are not made public but run roughly from late August to November.

How many badgers are killed in the cull?

Natural England grants each licence holder the minimum and maximum numbers of badgers they can remove. The government’s stated aim is to remove between **70-90%** of badgers in each cull area and across most of the southwest of the UK (except where culling is in low-risk areas, where there is no upper limit).

Nationally, **210,555** badgers have been killed since the cull began in 2013.

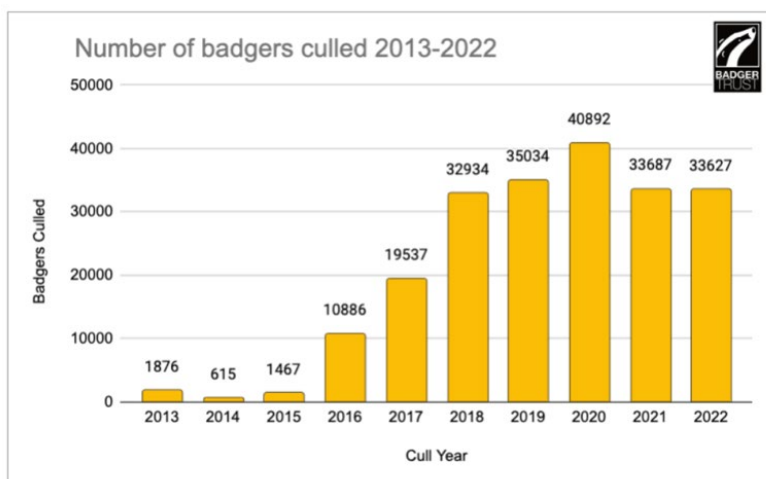


Figure 12: Badger Trust

2022 Gloucestershire Cull Figures

Area	Min. number allowed	Max. number allowed	Badgers killed	Killed by free-shooting	Killed by cage-trapping
Area 9 (North Cotswold)	219	1118	305	262	43
Area 29 (Stroud)	172	878	453	402	51
Area 46 (Forest of Dean)	240	325	244	231	13

Total: 1,002

Why are badgers culled?

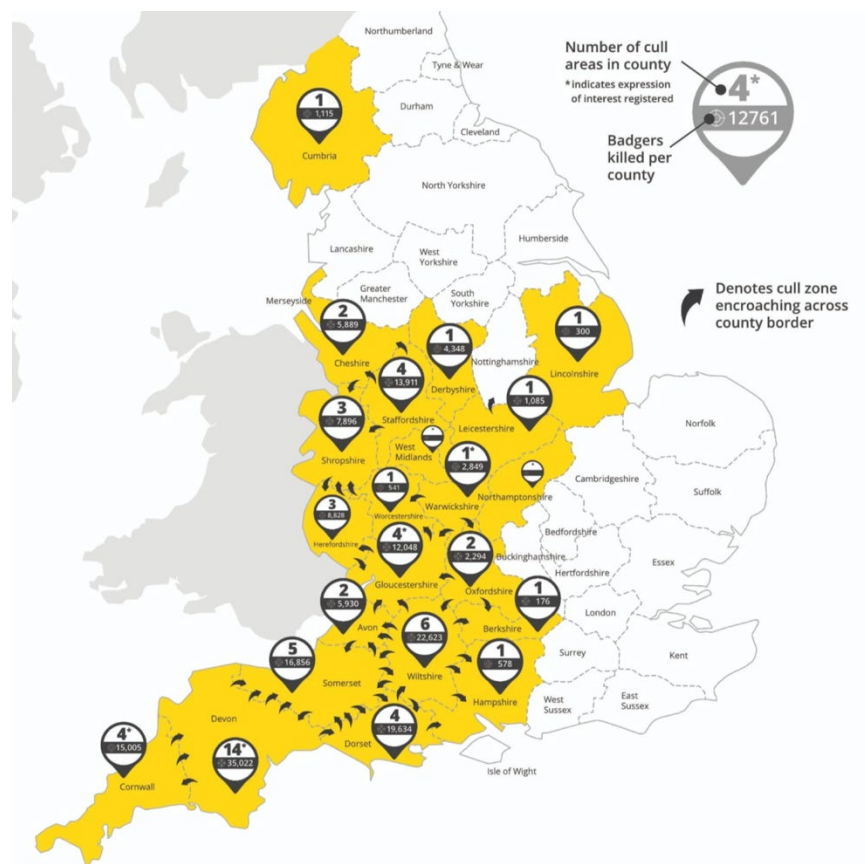
Badger Trust believes the cull is political. Without culling badgers, the Badger Trust does not believe that the farming lobby would have accepted the significant but vital changes to cattle-based measures required to curb bTB. The badger cull is not supported by either scientific or economic evidence.

How many cull areas are there?

There are 72 badger cull areas throughout England. Cull zones cover nearly 25% of England's entire land area across 20 counties stretching from Cornwall to Cumbria.

Even with promises of the badger cull being phased-out due to its ineffectiveness at controlling bovine TB in 2021, 11 new cull areas were added in 2022 to begin operating this year.

The original cull area (area 1) in West Gloucestershire, began in September 2013 and finally ended after 9 years of intensive badger culling on 31st January 2022. There are three operating cull areas in Gloucestershire, with five additional areas encroaching county lines. Illegal persecution is still ongoing in area 1.



Map produced by Badger Trust based on data 2013 to 2021 cull period © Badger Trust 2022

Do cattle spread bTB to each other?

Yes. Over 94% of bTB infections in cattle are a result of cow-to-cow infection. This is well recognised and is not a contested figure amongst vets, scientists, or within Defra.

Britain has one of the most intensive livestock industries in Europe with hundreds of thousands of cattle kept indoors in cramped damp conditions for over six months a year spreading bovine TB across herds.



Figure 13: Dairy farm in Wiltshire with bTB breakdown hosted local hunt 12 November 2022

Due to the stress of their environment the immune systems of cattle are placed under pressure making them more susceptible to bovine TB and other diseases.

Hundreds of thousands of cattle are regularly moved across the country every year with poor biosecurity and movement controls, which further spreads bovine TB. It spills over into the wider environment as a form of industrial pollution through faeces and slurry soil, water, organisms and infecting both wild and domestic animals.

How widespread is bTB infection of badgers?

Most badgers killed as a result of the cull policy to date will have been bTB free and their removal will have no impact on lowering bTB in cattle.

Of 102,349 badgers killed under cull licences 2013-2019, just over 900 were subject to post-mortems and tests for bovine TB. Of this number, less than 5% were found to have bovine TB to a degree where they posed a risk of infecting other badgers or possibly cattle.



Figure 14: Bait points found in zone 29

Gloucestershire Badger Group has a clear and unwavering stance which opposes the government funded badger cull. We believe culling badgers to tackle the bovine TB crisis is cruel, scientifically unproven, ineffective and inhumane. We know the underlying issues around uncontrolled bTB spread come down to poor regulation of cattle biosecurity, movement, testing and living condition standards. Badgers are **NOT** to blame. We encourage the government to implement a more cost effective and robust approach to curb bTB which does not involve the complete decimation of an iconic and protected British wild animal.

Gloucestershire Badger Group is made up of a group of voluntary members throughout the county whose common interest is the protection of badgers. We rely entirely on our volunteers and public donations to carry out our badger welfare and conservation work. We welcome new volunteers, no matter their level of prior knowledge, fitness or availability. Any help you can provide is tremendously appreciated; there's a place for everyone in our 'clan'.

Have a wonderful summer,

The Gloucestershire Badger Group Committee

