Badger Conservation Symposium 2026. Notes, Research and Key Findings

1. The importance of protecting badgers

The symposium explored the threats facing badgers in Britain, including wildlife crime, fox hunting, habitat destruction and the controversial badger cull.

More than 254,000 badgers have been culled in England since 2013 in efforts to control bovine tuberculosis in cattle. Although badgers can transmit the disease, the effectiveness of culling remains disputed.

Badgers also contribute to healthy ecosystems by aerating and mixing soil, dispersing seeds and creating underground setts that other animals can use.

2. Understanding people's beliefs

One lecture explored the psychology of changing attitudes towards wildlife.

Scientific evidence alone doesn't always change people's minds. Personal beliefs, values and emotions can strongly influence their views.

Understanding these attitudes is important when communicating with farmers, communities and people who have different opinions about conservation.

3. Wildlife crime statistics, 2021–2025

A police presentation reported 3,326 badger-related incidents across the UK over five years.

The annual totals presented were:

Year Incidents
2021 695
2022 651
2023 663
2024 658
2025 659
Total 3,326

The presentation identified sett interference as the largest category, accounting for approximately 55.7% of reported incidents.

Other categories included badger baiting, shooting, hunting with dogs, poisoning, trapping and development-related interference.

These figures represent recorded incidents rather than confirmed convictions.

4. ACC Matt Longman – Gloucestershire Police

Speaker details recorded at the symposium

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The police presentation explored badger persecution, fox hunting, sett blocking and the importance of collecting reliable intelligence.

The National Wildlife Crime Strategy

The approach to tackling wildlife crime is evidence-led. National priorities are informed by intelligence, reported incidents and analysis of emerging threats.

Badger Trust contributes information and expertise to this work, helping police and partner agencies understand the scale and nature of badger persecution.

Effective enforcement depends on accurate reporting, intelligence sharing, research and cooperation between the police and conservation organisations.

5. Badgers – The Forgotten Victims of Fox Hunting

An important part of the police presentation examined the impact fox hunting activity may have on badgers.

Although badgers are not the intended target, recorded incidents and field observations have raised concerns about:

* Deliberate blocking of sett entrances.
* Damage and disturbance to occupied setts.
* Increased activity around setts during hunts.
* Welfare risks to badgers living underground.

The presentation highlighted how badgers can become overlooked victims of hunting-related activity.

6. The Potential Scale of Sett Blocking

One of the most concerning statistics came from a slide titled The Scale of Potential Sett Blocking.

Research attributed to Badger Trust suggested that:

Approximately 52,000 badger setts could be blocked during a single hunting season.

The presentation also suggested that, if this estimate is correct, 99.5% of these incidents could be going unreported.

These are estimates rather than confirmed national totals, and the underlying research needs to be checked.

Nevertheless, the figures raise serious questions about how much sett interference goes undetected.

The message from the presentation was that badgers may be among the most overlooked victims of fox hunting activity.

Without reporting, the true scale of sett interference remains hidden.

7. Every Report Matters

The police stressed that all suspected incidents should be reported, even when:

* The incident has already happened.
* There is no obvious evidence identifying the offender.
* It appears relatively minor.
* It happened some time ago.

Reports should be made to both the police and Badger Trust.

Reporting helps:

* Build intelligence about potential offenders and locations.
* Identify emerging trends and patterns.

* Support police investigations.
* Direct crime prevention resources.
* Improve the national understanding of badger persecution.

A report that seems insignificant on its own may become important when combined with information received elsewhere.

If in doubt, report it.

8. Badger Crime Tactical Delivery Group

The Badger Crime Tactical Delivery Group brings together police, government agencies and conservation organisations to improve the prevention and investigation of badger-related offences.

Its priorities include stronger intelligence sharing, identifying new threats, supporting investigations and improving enforcement.

Cooperation between local badger groups and national organisations is important because local observations can contribute to a much wider picture of wildlife crime.

9. What the Police Say Needs to Happen Next

The priorities highlighted during the presentation were:

* Continue reporting suspected crimes to police and Badger Trust.
* Improve intelligence sharing and partnerships.
* Increase awareness of illegal sett blocking and interference.
* Support evidence-led research and monitoring.
* Include badger welfare in the wider fox hunting debate.

Two messages stood out:

“You cannot address what you cannot evidence.”

“We cannot tackle what we cannot see.”

Both reinforce the need to record incidents rather than assume someone else has already reported them.

10. Dr Blake Morton – The Coexist Project

Another particularly interesting lecture was delivered by Dr Blake Morton, who introduced the Coexist Project, associated with the University of Hull and University of Lincoln.

His research examines how humans and wildlife can coexist, particularly as development and other human activities place increasing pressure on natural environments.

The project uses citizen science, involving members of the public in gathering observations and supporting scientific research.

The STEP Framework

The project combines four areas:

* Space: Where wildlife and humans interact.
* Time: When these interactions happen.
* Ecology: Animal behaviour, habitat and environmental conditions.
* Psychology: Human attitudes, beliefs and behaviour.

Dr Morton explained that traditional research can overlook local knowledge or rely on approaches that don't account for differences between communities.

Local authorities also often lack the funding, time and staff needed for detailed monitoring.

The Coexist Project aims to combine different sources of information to identify problems earlier.

Early identification of human-wildlife conflict can make problems easier and less expensive to address.

For badger conservation, this could help identify threats from development, human disturbance and habitat loss before they become more serious.

11. Habitat Loss and Sett Surveys

Housing developments, roads and other land-use changes can destroy or fragment habitats.

Protecting established setts and identifying important feeding areas are essential parts of conservation.

Volunteer sett surveys help conservation organisations understand where badgers are living, whether setts remain active and where populations may be under pressure.

Accurate records can also provide useful information during planning consultations and conservation work.

12. My Main Takeaways

What I found most interesting was how wildlife conservation connects psychology, policing, science, technology and community involvement.

Protecting badgers isn't simply about having legislation in place. We need reliable evidence, better communication, public participation and stronger cooperation between organisations.

Dr Morton's lecture demonstrated how valuable local knowledge can be when combined with scientific research.

The police presentation reinforced why documenting suspected wildlife crime is so important.

My biggest takeaway is that we need to understand both wildlife and human behaviour if we want to make lasting improvements to conservation.

The more information we gather, the better equipped we are to identify threats, protect habitats and help wildlife thrive.

Useful references

For your conservation work, these are particularly relevant:

* Gloucestershire Police – Badger crime guidance. Includes warning signs and reporting advice.
* Badger Trust – Badgers and hunting. Explains sett blocking and associated risks.
* National Wildlife Crime Unit – Badger crime. Covers national intelligence-led enforcement.