

Fact Sheet 2: Badger Capture, Handling, Transport & Release



INTRODUCTION

Most badger-related calls to badger groups and wildlife rescue centres come from members of the public who discover casualties at the roadside (presumed road traffic collision (RTC)), or in gardens and outbuildings, often with 'territorial' wounds.

Any badger in unnatural surroundings or above ground during daylight hours may have been injured and should ideally be assessed, which often means capture and examination.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Badgers should be retrieved by those with experience only; those without suitable training and experience should refer calls to experienced colleagues.

Please see Fact Sheet 6: Legal Considerations for more detailed information.

EQUIPMENT AND PREPARATION

Those attending call-outs regularly will require equipment to retrieve an injured badger from a wide range of situations. Various professional equipment is available, including graspers, nets, boards, crush side cages and gauntlet gloves. However, with a bit of ingenuity, an injured animal can be caught using a wide range of alternatives; in an emergency, a weak badger can be encouraged to enter a clean dustbin or covered with a plastic storage box with a board slid under and secured, so long as the badger is contained safely until well-equipped personnel can attend.

Other preparations should also be made, including identifying where the injured badger will be taken; this could be a contact list of local vets or wildlife rehabilitation centres, including any pre-arranged agreements you may have.

For more detailed information, considerations and equipment lists, please read Fact Sheet 1: Starting a Badger Rescue Service.

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INITIAL CALL & ADVICE TO FINDER

It is important to get the right information from the caller to help locate and assess the rescue needs. The following information should be asked for and written down:

- Exact location (this could be What3Words, Grid Reference, a point on a map, a road name, or an identifiable landmark etc.)
 - The EXACT location of the badger will be required should it need to return to the wild after veterinary treatment and rehabilitation.
 - Ask the caller to give any other relevant information, such as the situation of the badger (e.g., on the road or down the side of a building), if the badger is moving, or if there are any visible injuries, etc.
 - Ask if the caller will stay at the location until a rescuer can arrive.
 - Make a note of the caller's name and telephone number in case you need to contact them.
 - Inform them that their safety is important and that they can take sensible safety precautions:
 - Use the hazard warning lights on their car
 - Not to disturb, approach or touch the badger
 - If the badger is collapsed and they have a blanket, they could be asked to cover it.
 - If the badger is in a building, they can be asked to close the doors, but if the badger becomes agitated or attempts to escape, they should retreat and monitor it from a safe distance.
 - Once all relevant information is taken, follow your rescue protocol to mobilise the rescue team.
- NB Your group may have a rescue report form, which can be utilised here.

ASSESSING THE SITUATION

Rescue calls can come in for badgers in a variety of situations; these can include badgers involved in road traffic collisions (RTC), found in a field or footpath, down the side of a building or in an outbuilding, caught in netting or snare, fallen into a pit/drain or well, and more. The most common reasons for adult badger rescues are RTC and 'territorial' bite wounds. On arrival at each rescue, time should be taken for an initial assessment based on the safety, practicality, and logistics of the rescue before taking action.



Images: © Northamptonshire Badger Group & Graham Lee

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INITIAL HANDLING

CONSCIOUS, MOBILE

Fully conscious and mobile badgers should be assessed with care. Any means of escape should be blocked and, using boards or panels, the badger should be encouraged into a darkened container (e.g.: a front opening cage covered with a blanket). Even if the badger appears uninjured, it should ideally be fully assessed before release.

CONSCIOUS, IMMOBILE

It is best to use a grasper, though it is not always easy to loop over a badger's head. Holding a stick or glove through the loop of a grasper, which the badger can be tempted to bite, can sometimes assist with the process, causing the badger to lift its head sufficiently to allow the grasper to be positioned. The grasper should then be lifted with the body supported at the same time by holding the rump (not the tail) and the badger can then be transferred into a secure container. It is important to be firm, not to hesitate and not to give the badger the opportunity to bite. Covering the head with a blanket throughout this procedure will help calm the badger.

If the finder is confident enough and the correct gloves are worn, it can be grasped by the scruff of the neck. The badger may be tempted to bite a glove, cloth or stout stick and grasp it whilst it is distracted. Note this technique is only for the confident and experienced, so if there is any doubt then a grasper should be used.

UNCONSCIOUS

NEVER assume an unconscious badger is without risk - they have been known to jump up from a seemingly unconscious state. It is important to first establish if the badger is unconscious and the best way to do this is by touching it with a long stick, starting from the hind-quarters and moving towards the head. If the badger is unconscious (breathing but not responding to touch) it can either be firmly grasped by the scruff of the neck or covered and rolled into a blanket. The rear end of the badger should always be supported when lifting to prevent aggravating possible injuries.

CUBS

Small cubs can often be rolled in a towel and placed in a carrier. Gauntlets are recommended as even small cubs can have a bad bite. If the cub is too strong or showing aggressive behaviour, revert to methods for older badgers.



Image: Cub Rescue © Northants Badger Group

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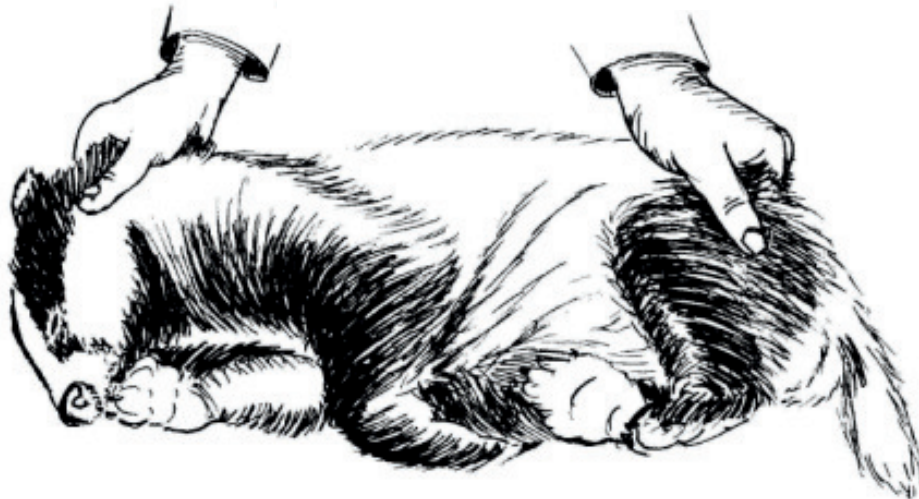
HOW TO LIFT AN INJURED BADGER

An injured but conscious badger should be lifted quickly into a carrying cage with the aid of a dog grasper. Once restrained by the grasper, it can be safely held by the rump and lifted into the cage. It should never be lifted by the grasper alone.



A severely injured, unconscious badger may be lifted by grasping the scruff of the neck and the loose skin on the rump at the base of the tail.

NB: Protective gloves should always be worn when handling badgers.



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FURTHER HANDLING

Further handling of a conscious badger should be kept to a minimum. Routine capture and handling with graspers whilst undergoing treatment should be avoided unless completely necessary. Cages with a crush facility allow for easy handling, and you may be able to encourage the badger in to a front opening entrance if it is covered by a towel.



Example of cage



During examination, the use of a muzzle (e.g. Baskerville® type) is recommended, along with usual handling methods.

NEXT STEPS

Once the badger is safely contained, a blanket should be put over the cage, and the cage should be put in the vehicle. The next step is immediately liaising with your preferred veterinary practice or wildlife rescue service for swift examination and treatment.

- Don't forget to make a note of the EXACT location you found the badger, this is important should the badger need to be released after successful treatment.

TRANSPORTATION

The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order, 2006 regulates all animal transportation. This order has exemptions for the transport of animals directly to or from veterinary practices/clinics under the advice of a veterinarian. However, transportation of the casualty to a wildlife rescue centre or from a centre for release may be considered controlled by the Order.

It is advisable to consider the general principles when transporting all badgers, regardless of the situation, as the Order was written with animal welfare in mind. Badgers, if correctly transported, travel well.

Important tips for transportation:

- Vehicles used for transportation should be well maintained to prevent unnecessary breakdowns.
- Don't transport a badger in a vehicle without it being contained in a suitable receptacle, preferably a cage, even if the badger seems unconscious.
- Cover the cage with a light blanket, as the badger will settle during transit if in a darkened cage.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Keep the badger warm whilst allowing good ventilation, including when the vehicle is stopped.
- Keep the length of time and distances travelled as short as possible.
- Never leave a badger unattended in a vehicle at any time.
- Two people should be involved in transportation for human health and safety.

See Fact Sheet 6: Legal Considerations for more information.

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SNARES

Badgers caught in snares can sustain significant injuries. It is important that the badger is caught and not released before veterinary care can be provided. Further movement of the badger in the snare must be avoided either by pinning the badger down with a heavy blanket or by holding down the snare with a forked stick or an old electric fence stake with a corkscrew end. Do not cut the snare wire from the stake until the badger is secured properly, then transfer the badger to a secure cage.

The actual snare around the body should not be removed until the badger is anaesthetised by a veterinary surgeon for a thorough examination.

Always refer to a veterinary surgeon for examination; snare injuries may not be obvious even when considerable damage has been done. Snared animals should be kept in captivity and not released for at least a week, as evidence of tissue damage can be delayed.

Targeted snaring of badgers is illegal and should be reported to the police as a wildlife crime; they may seek advice and support from the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

See Fact Sheet 7: Badger Emergency Care for more information



Snared Badger © SWWR

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WILDLIFE CRIME

If the reported incident is considered a wildlife crime, the police should be called. Call 999 if the incident is still taking place or 101 if the incident has already occurred.

Whilst the welfare of the individual badger concerned should take priority, care should be taken not to disturb what may be a crime scene or damage evidence that might be essential for a prosecution to be made.

Members of wildlife groups may ask veterinary surgeons to complete recording forms for gunshot injuries; such investigative procedures should always be secondary to clinical care. In addition, snared badgers who are deceased may need to be kept at the veterinary surgery with the snare for police to examine. Reporting forms are available at www.secretworld.org. Incidents should be reported on [Badger Trust's website Crime Report Form](#) or via the [Badger Watch App](#).

REPORTING WILDLIFE CRIME



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LACTATING FEMALES

In Spring it is of particular importance to check badgers that appear to be dead on the side of the road, as long as it is safe to do so. This is because badger cubs are usually born from January to March. If the badger is a lactating female then dependent cubs are at risk.

It is not always easy to see if the badger has cubs or if she has had a previous lactation. The key is the fur around the teat. Small rings (sometimes called feeding rings) around the teat tell you that the cubs are very young and would probably be too young to be able to move themselves out of the sett.

It is illegal to dig down into a sett, even if you can hear the cubs calling. A licence would be needed and is unlikely to be granted due to the disturbance of other badgers that may also be in the sett.

The more the milk is evident, the older the cubs will be, in which case it may be possible to feed the cubs at the sett (see next page). It is important to seek advice from an experienced person or rescue centre when considering this.

Figure 1a: Female lactating with very young cubs
© SWWR



Figure 1b: Age of cubs in relation to Figure 1a
© SWWR



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LACTATING FEMALES CONTINUED

Figure 2: Lactating Female © SWWR

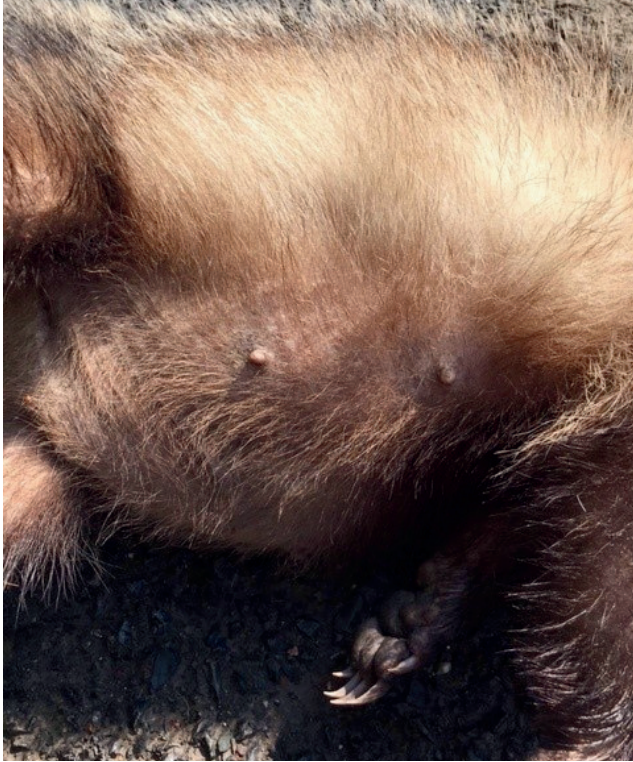


Figure 3: Heavily lactating female © SWWR



Figure 4: Heavily lactating female © SWWR



Figure 5: Female that hasn't lactated © SWWR



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MONITORED NATAL RETURN OF CUBS (MNR)

Badger cubs that are found may not need to be taken into long-term rehab as they may just be lost. However, any thought of returning cubs to a sett requires a lot of consideration and research before being attempted. Rescued cubs that are skeletal, with a heavy parasite load, or have serious territorial wounds are not suitable candidates for return.

A lot of work needs to be done to return a cub to a sett and to prove that the animal is not being abandoned. In the meantime, the cub is likely to need to be taken into care whilst this research work is being undertaken.

The following information is a brief overview of the work involved in attempting to return a cub to the natal sett and advice should be sought from an experienced person before attempting this for the first time.

- It is essential to research the area, initially identifying a sett near where the cub was found, although always remember that this may not be where the cub has come from. At no time should a cub be entered into a sett.
- If there are houses nearby, you should approach the residents to see if any have seen badgers in their garden or seen a dead badger on a road nearby.
- Trail cameras should be used on the sett to find out what animals are using it. Make sure the camera is set low to see nipples and observe for indicators such as females with signs they have had cubs and the possible presence of other cubs.
- If a lactating sow is seen, especially if she is seen with cubs of the same size, return should be considered. This can happen after a few days once the cub is stable and healthy.
- The cub needs to be marked either by micro-chipping or clipping the fur so that they can be identified. NB: A marking licence is required to allow this (See Fact Sheet 5: Badger Cubs).

Once the research and sett monitoring have been done, returning a cub involves identifying a badger path near the sett and taking the cub there in the evening, in a cage which can be opened by pulling the lid from a distance with a length of string. It is then a case of waiting to see if there is any interaction with the sow, which can take several hours.

Only around 50% of these will be let out. If there is no reaction, the cub is taken back into care. Many other factors affect the success of this process, with weather and the age of the cub being just two of them.

Post-monitoring with trail cameras is important to show that the cub/cubs have survived. Returned cubs have a better chance of survival with adults teaching them their territory and natural behaviour.

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SUPPORT FEEDING AT NATAL SETT

If more cubs, the same age as the rescued cub, are seen on site without a sow being present, there may be a possibility of returning the cub to the others and feeding the orphans on-site at the sett.

It is always preferable to keep cubs at their natal sett. However, this will involve daily feeds and continuous monitoring with trail cameras to check on the condition of the cubs. This can only be done with weaned cubs that are 12 weeks or older.

If you are going to attempt feeding at the sett, please contact an experienced person to understand the food types, quantities and length of time needed.

Please note this is a very brief outline about Monitored Natal Return and support feeding at the natal setts. These should never be undertaken without first seeking advice & guidance from an experienced person. Badger Trust can put you in touch with someone to offer advice and guidance.

Further Reading: *Parr A. (2016) The Rehabilitator's & Badger Enthusiast's Handbook: Returning Badger Cubs (Meles Meles) to the Natal Sett Following Short Term Rehabilitation. Lancashire Badger Group.*



Image: Cub on trail camera (natal sett support feeding) © Northants Badger Group

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RELEASE

Adult badgers must be returned to the EXACT location where they were found for social and territorial reasons and, therefore, do not need to be bTB tested.

Returning to a different location or nearest sett could put the badger in danger due to territorial reasons, this is also important for disease control.

See Fact Sheet 5: Cub Rearing and Fact sheet 3: Artificial Setts for more information on cub rescue, rehabilitation and release.



Caged badger © SWWR

- Always release an adult badger to the EXACT location where it was found.
- Releases are best at night, between dusk and dawn.
- If near a busy area or road, assess for the quietest time for release (usually midnight - dawn).
- At the release site, the cage should be placed on the ground & covered to allow the badger time to adjust.
- Remove the cage cover to allow the badger to take in sights and smells.
- Allow time for acclimatisation.
- When there is sufficient cover of darkness, open the end of the cage and let the badger leave of its own free will, in its own time.
- A badger should never be emptied from a cage into a sett entrance, but always returned to the exact location where it was found. Allow the badger to choose its own direction.

