

## **Persecution Update July 2015**

This brief report highlights the number of incidents that have been made known to Operation Meles from 1<sup>st</sup> Jan to 31 June 2015. The numbers recorded do not claim to be the total number of incidents that have taken place or to have been reported to other sources who have not made the operation aware that they are dealing with a badger incident.

The main sources of information are: -

RSPCA

Badger Trust and groups

Scottish Badgers

SSPCA

League Against Cruel Sports

Police

### **Breakdown of known incidents to date.**

In total there have been 252 incidents recorded this year of which 3 were discounted as probable traffic accidents. The number of dead badgers found on some roads gives rise to suspicion that the deaths are illegal and that badgers are routinely being dumped on roads having been illegally killed elsewhere. Although this has been found to be true in a small number of cases almost all RTAs found are genuine road traffic victims.

The incidents reported are from: -

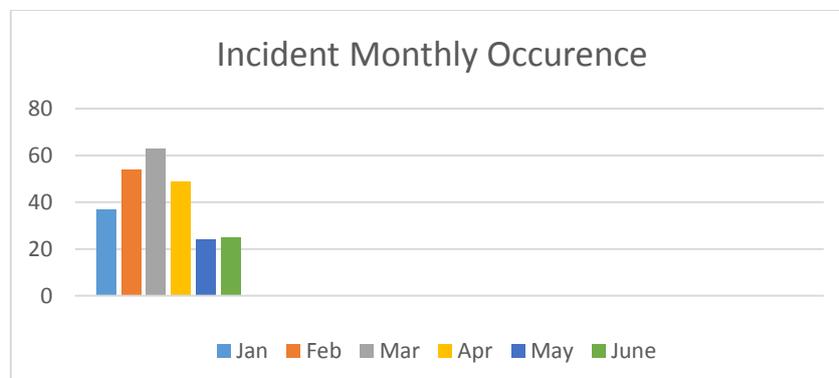
England 204

Scotland 28

Wales 14

Northern Ireland 4

In keeping with previous years many of the incidents take place in the winter months. The reports this year were made in the following months: -



It is difficult to collate the different types of incidents, not everyone uses the same classification, under one title but using the main offences we have endeavoured to gather the incident types into one collated category.

### **Sett Interference**

To date there have been 113 reports of setts being interfered with including setts destroyed, damaged or blocked many of which incidents could be avoided if the actions had been done under licence and the persons responsible had sought the appropriate advice. Many of these incidents relate to otherwise legal operations such as forestry or development.

Unfortunately 23 of the incidents related to alleged interference with setts by fox hunts. There appears to be a number of people ignoring the repeal of section 8 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 in relation to blocking setts. Some reports referred to terriermen digging out foxes which had gone to earth in badger setts. This is seasonal and Operation Meles will be running an awareness raising exercise at the appropriate time of the year.

### **Badger Baiting**

This year we have received information relating to 48 instances of badger baiting; mostly the reports refer to the discovery of dug setts after the event. However on a more positive note some good intelligence has been gathered for some areas and Op Meles partners are working together to target a number of named persons. There have been some police operations this year with a number of persons being reported for various offences relating to badger persecution. Although reported throughout the year there appears to be a main season during the winter/breeding months and Operation Meles will be running an awareness raising exercise at the appropriate time of the year.

### **Suspicious Deaths**

So far this year we have had 43 instances where dead badgers have been found in circumstances giving rise to suspicions that they were illegally killed. Many of these incidents refer to the finding of carcasses in strange circumstances, various body parts/skins being found, beheaded carcasses discovered and several badgers have been found with their major organs removed with almost surgical precision.

### **Snaring**

We are sure that only a few of the incident involving badgers being caught in snares are ever reported. This year there have been 15 such reports from around the country. Unfortunately a number of these incidents related to dead badgers found in snares, snares sett deliberately at badger setts and in one instance a live badger which had to be put down was found in a domestic garden with snare and a strainer post attached to the animal. One further incident related to the finding of a large mammal trap thought to have been set to catch badgers.

### **Poisoning**

There have been 11 incidents reported in which it is alleged that animals have been poisoned. This category includes the gassing of setts and 2 of the incidents recorded allege gassing has taken place. It is not easy without the full toxicology reports on each animal alleged to have been poisoned to confirm these reports but in many cases the animals have been dead for too long and are decomposed and therefore evidentially of little use. None of the incidents this

year have been confirmed as poison but one incident in which some tests were done highlighted the fact that Carbofurem, a very toxic banned pesticide more often associated with bird of prey deaths, may have been used.

### **Shooting**

Shooting incidents are, like poisoning, difficult to confirm. Without a forensic examination it is difficult to actually discover whether a badger has been shot. However this year we have received 8 reports of badgers having been shot and 7 of those incidents were confirmed as shootings. Although we made reference to how few badgers found on roads have been illegally killed a number of these confirmed cases refer to badgers being found at the roadside which gives rise to the suspicion that perhaps more of the annual road carnage are in fact illegally killed animals.

### **Social Media**

There is an increasing use of social media by perpetrators intent on letting their friends know what they have been up to and they post articles of Facebook and Twitter in order to do so. There have been a number of convictions already where part of the evidence used to secure successful prosecutions were video clips and images recovered from mobile phones, computers and other devices. This year three instances were brought to our attention which were passed on for further enquiry. Unlike the TV programs we see it is exceedingly difficult to trace some of the entries back to a person and there is no doubt that some entries are posted deliberately to raise a reaction out of people who go looking for such sites.

### **Convictions/Reported cases**

13<sup>th</sup> January. North Wales. Two defendants from Liverpool appeared before Mold Magistrates having pled guilty to digging for a badger and attempting to take a badger from a sett in Holywell last April. Both defendants received 160 hours community service, £300 costs each and £65 surcharge each. All of their equipment was forfeited, including their Land Rover Discovery.

16<sup>th</sup> January. Devon. Seven people appearing at court have denied a raft of charges relating to a dog and animal fighting investigation. The six men and one woman appeared at Torquay magistrates' court where they face a total of 35 counts under the Animal Welfare Act, the Protection of Badgers Act and the Deer Act. The case was brought following a joint investigation by police and the RSPCA.

4<sup>th</sup> February. Shropshire. Police and RSPCA inspectors raided a house in Shropshire acting on intelligence that dogs used to fight badgers were to be found at a house in Priest Weston. During the raid dogs were seized with injuries consistent with those sustained during the fighting and baiting of badgers. A rifle was also removed from the premises. A male and a female were arrested.

10<sup>th</sup> February. North Yorkshire. Appearing before Scarborough Magistrates' Court a terrierman for the Middleton Hunt was found guilty of blocking up a badger sett in current use, contrary to Section 3 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. He was given a community service order of 120 hours unpaid work and ordered to pay total costs and a surcharge of £970 in full within 28 days.

23<sup>rd</sup> February. Dorset. Badgers are thought to have suffocated underground after their sett was destroyed at a local nature reserve. It is probable that new born cubs will have been in the sett at the time.

27<sup>th</sup> February. Derbyshire. In a ground breaking first DNA from a dead badger found on an accuseds clothing led to the conviction of three men who bludgeoned a badger to death. All three were sentenced to 12 weeks in prison, banned for keeping dogs for life and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £80 each.

6<sup>th</sup> March. Hampshire. A male who admitted laying poison near a badger sett on the Isle of Wight was given a conditional discharge and order to reimburse the RSPCA for the cost of cleaning up the contaminated soil.

11<sup>th</sup> May Kent. Male sentenced to 160 days in prison and ordered to pay £10,000 at Folkestone Magistrates Court after Police and RSPCA recovered a number of seriously injured dogs that had been used in fighting badgers from his home near Canterbury in November 2013

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8<sup>th</sup> July 2015