

Badger



Photo credit: Darren Colello www.wildlifephotos.ca/gallery

Badgers, *Taxidea taxus*, are mustelids with relatives including skunks, weasels, wolverine, otters, martens and fishers. They are among the fastest and strongest digging mammals in the world moving earth at a rate of a metre per second.

Characteristics

The badger is a stocky animal with short but extremely strong legs. Their forelegs are particularly well developed with long claws, which are particularly useful for digging. Badgers are equipped with a long nose and, as a result, have a fantastic sense of smell. Including their tails, they are around 1 metre (3 feet) long, and usually weigh around 13-14 kgs (30 lbs). Most badgers have white and black faces, the black being primarily around the eyes. They have greyish or brownish body fur, with the legs and under-parts being of an even darker shade.

Lifecycle

Badgers can give birth anytime between November and August, but the majority of young are born in February. 1-3 cubs are born and they then spend about 8-10 weeks underground and emerge around May. It is important for badgers to be born early in the year, so that they have plenty of time to eat, grow, and put on fat for the enduring winter months. After about 10-12 weeks, young badgers disperse and lead solitary lives without their parents.

On average badgers in the wild live between 8-10 years. In captivity badgers can live up to 26 years. It is possible to be able to determine how old a badger is by looking at how worn their teeth are. This is due to earthworms being a part of their diet. The earth causes the white enamel of their teeth to wear down at an early age.

Habitat

Badgers are solitary mammals that prefer open plains, farmlands, and the forest edge. Badgers usually dig large but simple burrows for shelter and protection. The burrows usually consist of only one tunnel; however some burrows, especially breeding dens, are slightly more complex and have a few side tunnels branching off the main tunnel. Badgers will often occupy dens dug by either other badgers or other species, extending them if necessary.

Badgers inhabit most treeless regions of North America. Badgers are especially common in Canada, more specifically in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The badger population in British Columbia and Ontario is not as high. In British Columbia they are mostly found in the dry grassland regions of the Okanagan.

Diet

Badgers are omnivorous animals, but animal sources form the majority of their diet.

Badgers tend to feast on small mammals such as mice, gophers, chipmunks, and prairie dogs, along with other burrowing animals and earthworms. Badgers will also eat some lizards, insects, birds eggs and the carcasses of almost any animal.

Behaviour

Badgers are mostly nocturnal, but may exhibit daytime activity if there is not much disturbance from humans and if food supplies are low. Females commonly search for food during the day when they need to feed their young. Badgers that live in areas with cold winters have varied activity patterns and are much less active in the winter. Those that live in warmer climates do not tend to have this seasonal variation in activity patterns.

Like all mustelids, badgers possess scent glands and can easily recognize each others unique scent.

Threats

Adult badgers are not very vulnerable animals. They are strong and tenacious and can easily defend themselves with tooth and claw. The young however are more vulnerable and may be taken by larger predators or raptors.

Badgers are usually wanted by humans for their fur, which is used to make fine quality paint brushes. However human encroachment on forests and grasslands and poisons introduced into the badger's habitat pose the greatest threats to their survival.

To assist the survival of badgers, humans should gain more understanding of this animal and its habitat. Establishing protected areas, reducing the use of rodenticides, and adopting appropriate habitat management practices are all ways to help sustain the declining badger population.

Other Interesting Facts

- Badger comes from the French word "becheur" meaning digger.
- A group of badgers is a sett, coming from the ancient word "cette," which also means a group of badgers.

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