



River & Rowing
Museum
Henley on Thames

Wind in the Willows Fact File: Badger

In Wind in the Willows:

Retiring, but courageous and wise.

In the wild:

Appearance

The badger, *Meles meles*, is the largest member of the weasel family in Britain. Badgers live in groups of up to 12 individuals and each clan has its own territory. Distinctive black and white stripes running from nose to shoulder make badgers easy to recognise. Their wedge-shaped bodies and short, strong legs are perfectly adapted for digging.

Diet

Badgers are classified as carnivores but are essentially omnivorous. They eat frogs, rodents, birds, eggs, lizards, insects, seeds, berries and roots but earthworms are their favourite food. One badger can consume up to 200 in a night!

Behaviour

Badgers live in sets - underground galleries and passageways - in small woodland clearings or copses and these homes are passed down from one generation to the next. They tend to use the same well-trodden pathways around sets and across their territories. Other tell-tale badger signs include scratch marks on trees, hairs caught on barbed wire or nesting material near the set that they've brought out to air.

Badgers have an acute sense of smell. Their hearing is sharp and although they don't have good eyesight, they can spot movement or unusual objects nearby. They are largely nocturnal animals and the best time to see them is at dusk.

Males ('boars') and females ('sows') can breed at any time of the year and have litters of between one and six cubs. Cubs playing make puppy-like noises, while adults growl or bark as a warning and purr with pleasure. Badgers are found throughout Europe, including some Mediterranean islands, across northern Asia to southern China. In Britain, they are found in south west England, Wales and parts of north east England. There are urban badger 'hotspots' such as Brighton, Birmingham and Bristol. Over 200 sets have been recorded around London.

Dangers

In the UK badgers are protected by law - it's an offence to kill, injure or capture a badger, or to interfere with its set.

