

## The American Badger – *Taxidea taxus*

by C. Millar

*‘Once well underground,’ he (Mole) said, ‘you know exactly where you are. Nothing can happen to you, and nothing can get at you. You’re entirely your own master, and you don’t have to consult anybody or mind what they say. Things go on all the same overhead, and you let ‘em, and don’t bother about ‘em. When you want to, up you go, and there the things are, waiting for you.’*

*The Badger simply beamed on him. ‘That’s exactly what I say,’ he replied. ‘There’s no security, or peace and tranquillity, except underground.’ (1 The Wind in the Willows p. 75)*

Both moles and badgers are hole diggers, but with their powerful front claws, badgers cannot be beaten. Badgers “can excavate a tunnel faster than a man can dig a ditch of the same length...When burrowing, badgers loosen soil with the curved fore claws and send it flying with the shovel-like hind claws.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers) Grasslands provide the perfect habitat for digging and also for providing homes for the ground squirrels and marmots that badgers prefer to prey upon.

It is no wonder Mole was impressed by the extensive tunnel network, of Badger. Badger tunnels or setts “all have the same features: a long entrance tunnel with an eight to twelve-inch elliptical opening, a breeding chamber, and a safety area to which the female can flee if her burrow is invaded.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers) The American Badger often digs multiple setts and some are as long as 30 feet in length.

Badgers are solitary creatures and nocturnal, but if you are lucky, you may spot a badger or even a sett that has evidence of occupation. They are red listed, that is a species at risk, so finding one is unusual. Estimates are that there are fewer than 250 badgers existing in the Okanagan Valley and Cariboo Region.

Therefore, when Ron Lancour had a very unsettling encounter with a badger on July 26<sup>th</sup> of this year, it was both unusual and surprising that it happened at all in broad daylight.

*“Outdoorsman Ron Lancour was alone in his boat on Sheridan Lake near 100 Mile House. Enjoying a peaceful day fishing, a full-grown badger suddenly jumped on board.*

*"He was telling me to get out of that boat, because he was coming in there. I guess he was tired of swimming," Lancour said.*

*"I grabbed my net. With the handle I tried to poke him back into the water, but he was gaining ground on me."*

*Lancour said he then fought off the badger three more times with a wooden oar before he was able to push it back into the lake.*

*But the persistent badger then jumped back in the boat from a different side, and Lancour had to fight it off again.*

*"I knew that I had to stun him somehow. I certainly didn't want to hit him across the head and kill him — they are a protected species in B.C.," he said.*

*Lancour says he finally managed to escape for good by speeding away from the animal.” (3 CBC Radio)*

Ron had worked with wild animals and knew that you should not mess with badgers. Badger jaws “are exceptionally powerful...the lower jaw is so hinged that the skull must be fractured before it can be dislocated.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers)

It may be surprising then that female badgers or sows, are very gentle and caring of their kits. The males or boars, wash their hands of any care giving, but the females create little dens in the setts with “grass lined bedding chambers” which they fastidiously clean. For 10 to 12 weeks the mothers look after the young and carry them with their teeth if they need to move – which they frequently do. (4 Badger: Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection)

What do these formidable animals eat? Their diet consists mainly of: “burrowing animals such as ground squirrels, pocket gophers and marmots, but also includes animals that take refuge in burrows including snakes, rabbits and chipmunks.” (5 Ministry of the Environment)

Badgers are survivors. During the winter months when food is scarce, they stay quietly in their warm setts and go into a “mild torpor... to slow their heart rates and body temperature.” (4 Badger: Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection) Despite their reduction in numbers due to habitat loss, rodent control programs

(poisoning) and highway kills, there have been sightings in the Kelowna area this year including on Black Mountain.

Perhaps badgers are survivors as Kenneth Grahame prophetically wrote in 1906. In the words of Badger, “But we remain. There were badgers here, I’ve been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be.” (1 *The Wind in the Willows*, p. 78)

If you do spot a badger or evidence of activity in front of a badger den, you should try to photograph it and report it to the Ministry of the Environment at 1-888-223-4376 or [www.badgers.bc.ca](http://www.badgers.bc.ca)

Footnotes:

1. *The Wind in the Willows*; Grahame, Kenneth. Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York. 1961
2. *Wonders of Badgers*; Lavine, Sigmund A. Penguin Publishing Group, 1985. ISBN 0396085814
3. *With files from Brady Strachan and Maryse Zeidler* CBC, July 26, 2016
4. Badger; Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, 2002.<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/wld>
5. Ministry of Environment - Okanagan Region - Badger  
[www.env.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/esd/atlas/species/badger.html](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/esd/atlas/species/badger.html)



[http://www.earthrangers.com/content/wildwire/american\\_badger\\_walking.jpg](http://www.earthrangers.com/content/wildwire/american_badger_walking.jpg)

Notice the black ‘badges’ on its cheeks – hence its name.