

### **Badger persecution**

Sir, I am the Wildlife Liaison Officer for the Hertfordshire Constabulary and the present Chairman of the Herts and Middlesex Badger Group.

I read with interest the article on badger persecution in England and Wales (*Animal Welfare* 1992, 1: 291-296). The author argues, in my view quite correctly, that the number of persons prosecuted with offences under badger protection legislation is a more reliable measure of persecution than the number of persons convicted. However, I would suggest an even more reliable indicator would be the number of persecution incidents recorded.

Most badger groups keep records of such incidents as sett interferences and illegal killing of the badgers. Of course not all cases of persecution are discovered but of those that are, sadly only a small proportion of offenders are detected and an even smaller number of cases result in a conviction.

An example to illustrate the point is in Hertfordshire where my own Force charged six people over the period 1979 to 1989. Of these, three were convicted. During this same period an estimate of the number of setts interfered with is no less than 100. Another example is South Yorkshire where it is believed that through persecution, there are now more badger diggers than active badger setts. In that area only eleven people have been charged over the same eleven year period.

The question of why persecution is rife in one area whilst unknown in another is difficult to answer. There is

certainly a cultural element. The main areas of digging occur in mining areas. Unemployment is also a factor, if for no other reason than would-be diggers have time on their hands.

A disturbing trend is that badger diggers are travelling further afield. Several incidents have occurred recently in Hertfordshire involving men from Yorkshire. People bent on badger persecution are prepared to travel considerable distances to engage in their 'sport'.

The only answer to the problem of badger persecution is public education, coupled with effective enforcement, and backed up by deterrent sentences by the Courts.

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