

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August

**Subject: Operation Meles**

For Immediate Release

Operation Meles

Saving badgers from torture and death

Scottish Badgers and The Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), with the support of the Badger Trust and other partners, has initiated Operation Meles\*, a UK-wide programme to achieve consistency in recording and reporting crime against the protected species. The badger defends itself by standing and fighting if cornered, making it unusually vulnerable to predation by sadistic criminals, so a vital part of the Badger Trust's work is to prevent persecution and to assist with the prosecution of offenders.

Ian Hutchison, Species Protection Officer of Scottish Badgers, and his colleagues have set up Operation Meles as a strategically-planned approach to persecution and the Badger Trust is publishing it as widely as possible on behalf of the whole badger protection movement. The Trust was originally founded to fight the cruelty of digging and baiting, and it was instrumental in securing the legislation the species now enjoys.

Mr Hutchison said: "Historically official crime statistics failed to reflect the true level of badger persecution in the United Kingdom. It became increasingly obvious that there is much more crime being committed than is being recorded, and few resources committed to proper investigation".

However, largely through the work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU), badger crime has been raised to the level of a UK Wildlife Crime Priority. In effect every Chief Constable has to account for their force's work to combat crimes against badgers and their setts.

One problem is that Scotland, Northern Ireland and England and Wales have different legislation leading to discrepancies in the law. Operation Meles will be intelligence-led with the staff of the NWCU analysing information from a variety of sources.

A previously successful operation targeted egg thieves and seriously reduced the incidence of such crimes. Now, a number of organisations have agreed a UK badger persecution priority plan, and have agreed to take lead roles that also recognise differing legislation across the UK.

The RSPCA will be establishing priorities, Scottish Badgers and the Badger Trust will oversee prevention and intelligence will be coordinated by the NWCU. Enforcement will be by the North Yorkshire Police and RSPCA (England and Wales), SSPCA and NWCU (Scotland), The Police Service Northern Ireland with the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Nth Ireland).

Scottish Badgers has produced a training manual to ensure that area badger groups follow a pattern of procedures to achieve consistency in effective evidence-gathering and reporting. Mr Hutchison said: "We want willing volunteers to be trained in badger crime investigation so that they can act as local points of contact with their own police forces. This will go a long way towards bringing offenders before the courts".

\* *Meles meles* are the genus and species names applied to the European badger by Carl Linneus in 1758, and recognised by the International Taxonomic Information System.

CONTACT

Ian Hutchison

Email [ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk](mailto:ian@scottishbadgers.org.uk)

Tel. 01356 624851  
Mob. 07866 844232  
[www.scottishbadgers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbadgers.org.uk)

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.  
PO Box 708, EAST GRINSTEAD, RH19 2WN  
Tel: 08458 287878 Fax: 02380 233896  
E-mail [press@badgertrust.org.uk](mailto:press@badgertrust.org.uk)  
[www.badgertrust.org.uk](http://www.badgertrust.org.uk)  
Registered charity no.1111440  
Company registered in the UK No.5460677