

# BADGER BAITING IN NORTHERN IRELAND



**Organised Criminal Cruelty Exposed**

# Contents

Foreword	<b>3</b>
Northern Ireland Badger Population	<b>4</b>
Badger Baiting Scale and Trends	<b>6</b>
Offender Profile	<b>9</b>
Networking and Communications	<b>11</b>
The Dogs	<b>13</b>
The Hunting of Other Mammals	<b>15</b>
Challenges to Enforcement	<b>16</b>
Recommendations	<b>17</b>
Appendices	<b>18</b>
Operation Brockwatch	
BBC NI Spotlight – Exposed Hunting with Dogs	
Public Opinion	

## Foreword

Badgers and their setts are protected in law. It is a criminal offence to harm or disturb these animals, obstruct access to their place of refuge or destroy or damage anything which conceals or protects their place of refuge.

Badger baiting involves the digging out and killing of badgers by dogs. A small terrier dog wearing a radio collar is sent below ground into a sett. Once the dog has located a badger, the offenders dig down until they reach the dog and badger. The badger is then pulled from the sett, often disabled, and thrown to larger dogs which are allowed to kill it.

The latest operational statistics for the years 2019-21 record 32 suspected badger baiting offences. This vastly understates the scale of badger baiting in Northern Ireland as it only references reported crime and it is by nature a clandestine activity. Intelligence gathering by the USPCA Special Investigations Unit indicates in excess of 150 active badger baiters in Northern Ireland. The badger baiting season is September to March, a period of seven months or approximately 30 weeks. If each individual killed just one badger every two weeks during this period, this would mean that a total of 2250 ( $150 \times 15 = 2250$ ) badgers are killed each year purely for sport or fun.

When not baiting badgers, these violent men, who get off on the blood lust and cruelty of pitting animals against each other to fight to the death, are hunting foxes with their dogs. This is the underbelly of fox hunting in Northern Ireland. The dogs also suffer severe injuries from this fight to the death and these injuries are a rite of passage, giving kudos to the owners who brag about their exploits on social media.

Statistics acquired by the BBC from the Department of Justice reveal that there have only been eleven prosecutions relating to killing or injuring wild animals in Northern Ireland since 2011. Fewer than three of these individuals were subsequently convicted. Every year thousands of helpless mammals are killed purely for the fun of the individuals engaged in badger baiting or other forms of hunting with dogs. In addition, the dogs involved in this recreational activity suffer horrific injuries. Given the scale of the problem, these shocking statistics clearly show the inadequacy of current investigative practice and highlight considerable weaknesses in the enforcement and prosecution of these violent and barbaric offences.

Northern Ireland is also the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have specific legislation to protect foxes and other animals from these hobby hunters who kill for pleasure.

Doing nothing is not an option.

A photograph of a badger peering out from its sett entrance. The badger is the central focus, with its distinctive black and white stripes visible. The sett is a hole in the ground, surrounded by soil and some green foliage. The lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting.

**DOING NOTHING  
IS NOT AN  
OPTION**

## Northern Ireland Badger Population

### Badgers

The Wildlife Trust describes badgers as ‘the UK’s largest land predator and are one of the most well-known British species. They are famed for their black and white stripes and sturdy body, using their strong front paws to dig for food and to perfect their hobbit-like burrows, called ‘setts’. They are a shy and nocturnal creature that many of us will never have seen.

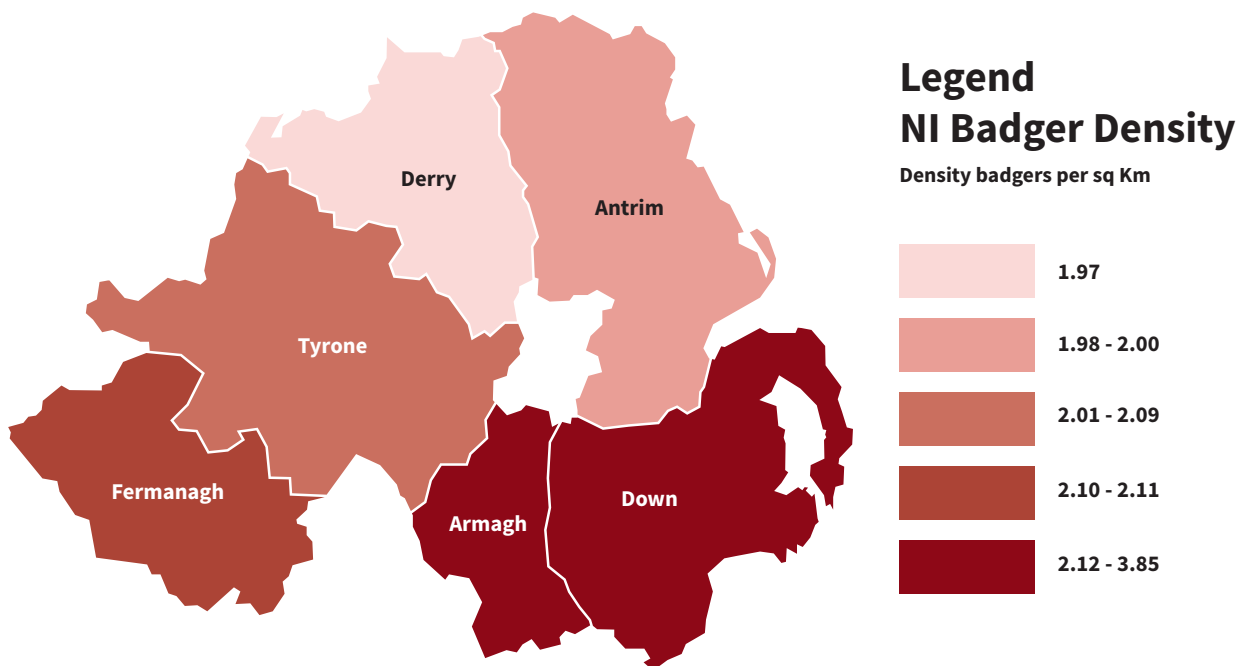
### Badger Setts

Badgers live in a network of underground tunnels known as a ‘sett’. The tunnels can have a combined length of several hundred metres, and individual tunnels can exceed 20 metres in length. Incorporated within these are a number of widened sections and cul-de-sacs used as nesting and sleeping chambers.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Environment and Heritage Service, habitat is the most significant factor in the distribution, site selection, and sett size in Northern Ireland. Due to the lack of woodland cover here, the majority of setts are located in hedgerows, or amongst dense patches of gorse and scrub on banks close to fields. As a result of the physical limitations of hedgerows and scrubland, sett size in Northern Ireland is smaller than that in the rest of the United Kingdom, where the majority of setts are established within woodland. An abundance of mature hedgerows and smaller field patterns, providing increased cover will contribute to higher density levels (of setts and badgers) within a geographical area.<sup>2</sup>

### Badger Density

The most recent Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Badger Survey (2007/08) estimated that there were 33,500 badgers (in 7,500 social groups) across Northern Ireland. Due to the prevalence of favourable landscape features, counties Down and Armagh had the highest density of badger social groups.<sup>3</sup> This can be seen from the map below, which was taken from the latest Partnership Against Wildlife Crime NI (Badger Subgroup) Badger Persecution Report 2016-18.<sup>4</sup> County Down has the joint highest badger population density along with County Armagh in Northern Ireland.





Entrance to a badger sett which has been dug by badger baiters and filled in again

## The Protection of Badgers

Badgers, and the setts where they live, are protected by law throughout Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, badgers and their setts are protected under the Wildlife Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. It is a criminal offence to intentionally or recklessly harm or disturb these animals, obstruct access to their place of refuge or destroy or damage anything which conceals or protects their place of refuge.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is responsible for implementing the wildlife legislation and can offer advice or guidance to anyone planning to undertake any activity which may result in the disturbance of badgers or their setts.

## The Persecution of Badgers

Badgers, possibly due to their size, are rarely the target of other animal predators. Regrettably, they are most at threat from humans. Badger persecution comes in many forms, ranging from the horrific practice of badger baiting to avoidable sett disturbance / destruction which can occur when people carry out otherwise legal operations on land such as forestry or agricultural tasks. Badgers have been historically persecuted for sport, pest control and disease control.

## Badger Baiting Scale and Trends

### What is Badger Baiting?

Badger baiting involves the digging out and killing of badgers. Dogs (often wearing radio locator collars) are sent below ground into a sett. Once the dog has located a badger, the offenders dig down until they reach the dog and badger. The badger is then pulled from the sett, often disabled, and thrown to bigger dogs, which are allowed to kill it. Both dogs and badgers suffer severe injuries, often proving fatal. On some occasions the dead badger(s) is/are placed back in the hole, which is then carefully filled in with soil. Sometimes the badgers are removed from the scene alive. These poor animals will suffer a cruel and painful death at a later point.

### Recorded Offences

Type of Persecution	2019	2020	2021	Total
Suspected Badger Baiting	13	3	16	32
Sett Disturbance	9	11	22	42
Traps/Snares	3	4	1	8
Suspected Poisoning	0	1	2	3
Shot	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>86</b>

The following table shows PSNI 'operational' statistics for all recorded badger persecution offences from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. The offences are shown by calendar year.

A total of 86 potential offences were recorded during this three-year period. Of these 32 related to suspected badger baiting, 42 were in respect of disturbing a badger sett. The remaining 12 offences related to the use of traps or snares or the shooting or poisoning of badgers.

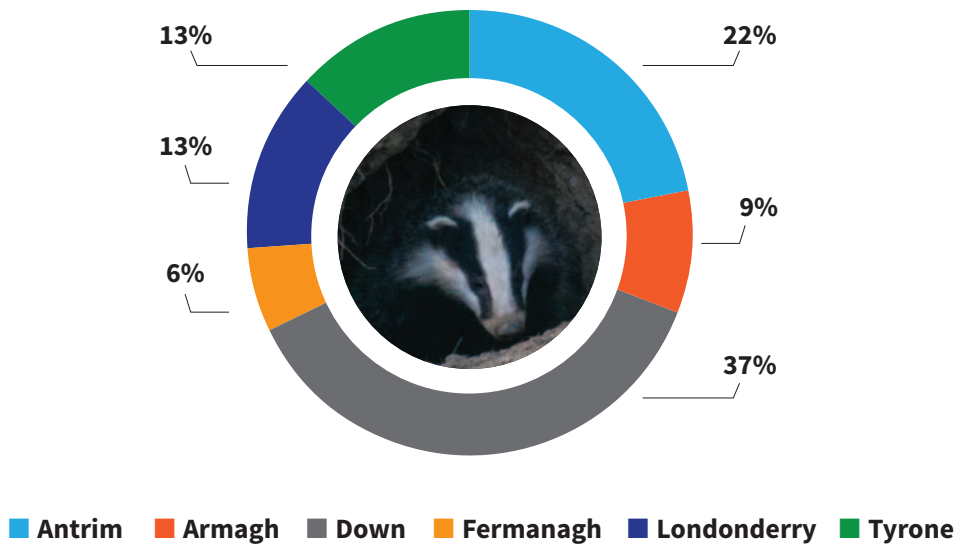
Only three badger baiting offences were recorded during 2020. It could be argued that this was due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the restrictions placed on the public during this time.

The chart below breaks down the 32 reported badger baiting offences between 2019-21 by the county in which each was committed.

### Suspected badger baiters with their dogs and spades at a badger sett



## Badger Baiting Offences 2019-21 (By County)



The two counties with the highest level of cases are Down and Antrim. There may be a number of reasons for this. As highlighted previously, County Down has the joint highest badger population density (along with County Armagh) in Northern Ireland. USPCA is aware that individuals and networks are prepared to travel to locations with the greatest number of badgers. It is worthy of note that the two areas of Northern Ireland with the highest concentration of known offenders is South Down, Belfast and Newtownabbey.

A total of 263<sup>5</sup> badger related incidents were recorded by PSNI between 2016 and 2018. Of these, more than 80 related to suspected badger baiting offences. The most recent figures 2019-21 represent a sixty per cent reduction compared to this previous three-year period. It is unlikely that these statistics reflect the true scale of offending or that such a reduction took place. Rather it may highlight issues in the reporting and/or recording of such offences. Between January 2021 and October 2022 USPCA shared information on Badger Baiting with PSNI on 63 occasions. These related to 47 persons of interest and 36 incidents or offences.

## The Underreporting of Badger Persecution Cases

Similar to other jurisdictions, the full scale of badger baiting offences in Northern Ireland is not fully understood. What is clear is that the vast majority of offences will not be reported to the PSNI. There are a number of reasons for this:

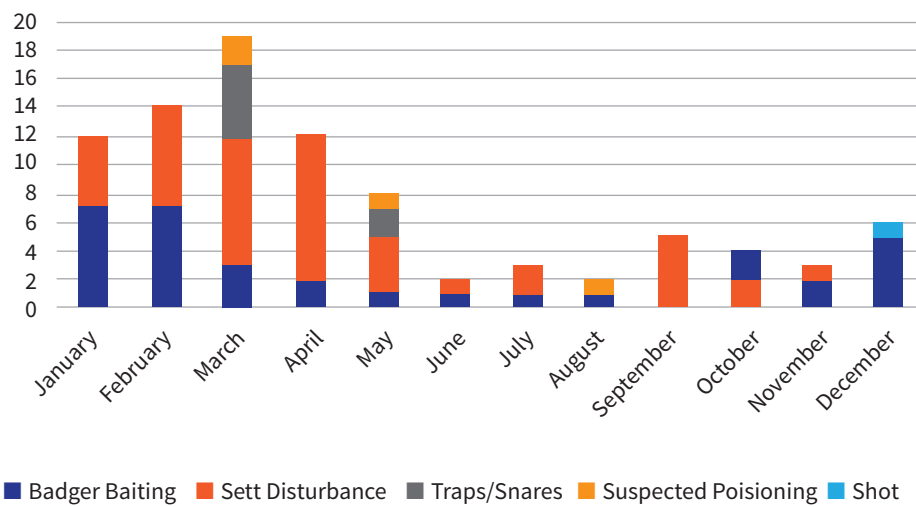
- Badger habitats are usually in woodland or hedgerows. Offences occur in locations that are infrequently visited by humans. Indeed, even the landowner may be unaware that a badger sett has been disturbed. In addition, many badger baiters are skilled at covering their tracks. Holes are carefully filled in.
- Some landowners may be complicit in the offences committed. Baiters may be welcomed or even invited onto the land to carry out their cruel activities.
- Many members of the public will be unaware of what a badger sett looks like, so won't be able to recognise a disturbed sett.

It is assessed that many of the individuals known by USPCA to be involved in badger baiting are motivated purely by a lust for blood. They often hunt in groups. This can be intimidating for landowners or members of the public. USPCA is aware of a number of cases in which landowners have disturbed baiters in the process of digging a sett. Some of them have been threatened with physical violence. This can deter the reporting of offences.

## When does it take place?

More than two thirds (69% - 22 incidents) of reported suspected badger baiting offences between 2019 and 2021 occurred between the months of November and March. It should be noted that badger cubs are most commonly born during late January and February each year. Attacking the setts at this time or killing a lactating sow undoubtedly puts the young cubs at risk. USPCA is aware that a number of offenders engage in this cruel practice all year round. This is corroborated by the chart below. The aggregated figures show that at least one suspected badger baiting offence was reported in eleven of the twelve months of the year.

### Badger Persecution Offences 2019-21 (By Month)



Dead badger showing facial injury from fighting

## The True Scale of Badger Baiting in Northern Ireland

USPCA is aware of a cohort of persistent offenders who regularly target and persecute badgers and other vulnerable mammals - more than 150 such people. It is important to note that badgers are a sociable animal. They live in communities; each sett will likely contain many animals. These offenders are rarely content in only killing one badger, they will kill as many as they can. Baiters often visit more than one sett on a single day. The number of badgers killed each year will be in the thousands.

To illustrate this, if we consider the 150 suspects. Many are known to bait or hunt badgers, foxes and other wild animals on at least a weekly basis. Some will hunt less regularly. Badger baiting is mostly carried out between the months of September and March, a period of seven months or approximately 30 weeks. If each individual killed just one badger every two weeks during this period, this would mean that a total of 2250 (150 x 15 = 2250) badgers are killed each year purely for sport or fun. This is unacceptable. It should be noted that this is a conservative and the total number will exceed this. These individuals will often kill more than one animal at a time. In addition, many hunt and bait all year round. This is confirmed by the PSNI statistics.



## Offender Profile

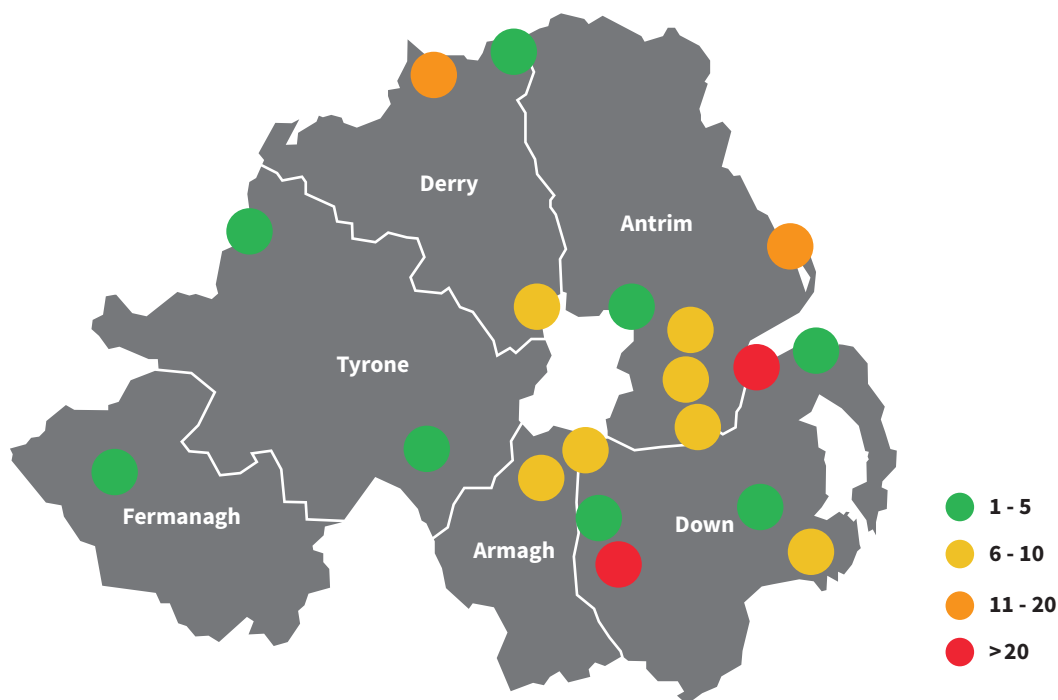
### Who is involved?

The USPCA have knowledge of more than 150 individuals who are believed to be engaged in the persecution of badgers. Many will offend on a regular basis (at least weekly), while others will engage in badger baiting on a less frequent scale. What do we know about these offenders?

### Where do they live?

Badger baiting and the hunting of other wild mammals including foxes, rabbits and hares is often perceived by the public as a rural activity. It is acknowledged that most of the hunting takes place in the countryside, this is where the animal habitats are largely seen. However, in an attempt to understand the motives of at least some of the people engaged in this cruel activity, it is important to examine where the suspects live.

Known offenders reside in every County of Northern Ireland. This can be seen in the map below.

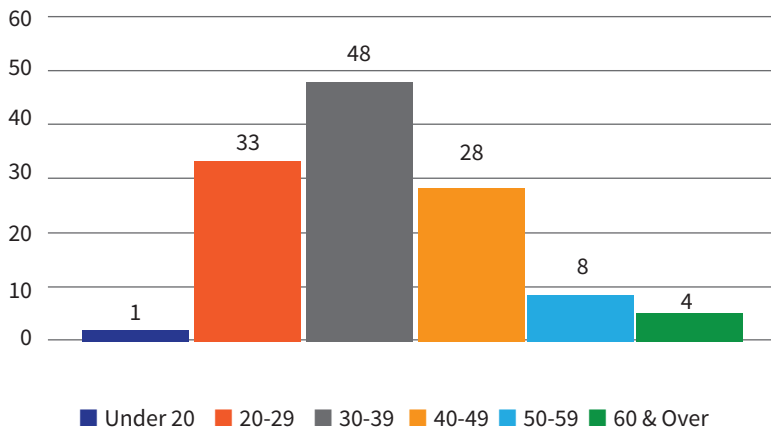


Many known badger baiting suspects have posted material on their social media accounts referencing hunting as a rural past time. Some have commented that people behind and supporting last year's attempt to introduce legislation to ban or restrict hunting with dogs did not fully understand this 'way of life'. It is therefore interesting to note that almost one third (32%, 50 individuals) live in either Belfast/Newtownabbey or Derry/Londonderry. Many others reside in other cities or large towns. They travel into the countryside to carry out their cruel practices. This would suggest that their motivation is based on bloodlust and a desire to kill and not in any way connected to rural management or the protection of livestock.

## Gender and Age

Badger baiting appears to be predominately, but not exclusively carried out by males. USPCA is aware of a small number of females who are involved in this form of hunting or organised animal fighting.

### Age of Known Badger Baiting Suspects



Badgers at play at sett protected by Operation Brockwatch

It can be seen from the graph above that the vast majority (89%) of badger baiting suspects, where age is known, fall between the age of 20 and 49. However, many of the known suspects are known to have commenced hunting with dogs at a young age and USPCA is aware of teenagers (at least) as young as fourteen who have been introduced to hunting. It is likely that the younger individuals will begin by hunting other prey. There are many photographs on social media of Northern Ireland based (mostly male) youths posing with hunting type dogs alongside dead foxes, hares and rabbits.

Badger baiting is a physical activity. The rigours of digging badger setts may be the reason that there are less people over the age of 50 still engaged in baiting.

## Pathways to Offending

Individuals known to USPCA have been introduced to badger baiting and hunting with dogs via a number of different routes. These include:

- **Familial** – Suspects commenced badger baiting and hunting with dogs following introduction from close older family members. Some of these families have been hunting with dogs and badger baiting for several generations.
- **Geographical** – Individuals appear to be from a small geographical area. Sometimes a number of suspects reside on the same street.
- **Social** - There are a number of networks that appear to have been forged at a young age. Many of the members of these groups were educated at the same schools.
- **Paramilitary Groups** – Through membership of or association with paramilitary groups. USPCA know of a small number of badger baiting networks where the members appear to have links to a paramilitary group.

## Criminal Background

It is clear from the way that they communicate and from other behaviours that individuals engaged in this cruel pastime are fully aware that badger baiting is unlawful. It is equally apparent that they have little or no respect for the law. Media research has found that a number of the 150+ suspects known to USPCA have been charged and/or convicted of a range of other criminal offences, including murder, robbery, drugs criminality, fraud and paramilitary activity.

---

## Networking and Communication

### Organised Crime Groups

The individuals who engage in badger baiting see it as a social activity. An analysis of information held by USPCA reveals that badger baiting is primarily carried out by groups of males. The size of these groups varies from two to more than ten. In many ways these networks could be referred to as organised crime groups. Their activities are highly organised and coordinated.

### Social Media

Badger baiting has changed and evolved over recent years. The advent of social media has further enabled and facilitated increased networking among people actively involved in these barbaric pursuits. Many offenders have a strong need to boast, brag and share details of their perceived accomplishments. Some photograph and/or video these cruel activities and share them on social media, most frequently in 'private' Facebook groups. Some regularly share information in relation to the depth they have dug and/or the speed of the kill. In addition to sharing details of their kills, these platforms are used to arrange hunts, to buy, sell or swap dogs and/or equipment for use in these activities, including locator collars and lamps for nighttime hunting.

A small number of badger baiting suspects crave attention from across the hunting community. They desire an almost celebrity status for themselves and their dogs. This is not welcomed by many individuals who hunt with dogs as they feel it brings unwanted attention to their activities and may impact public perception and drive calls for legislative change.

### Coded Language

As discussed earlier in this report, badger baiting is unlawful in Northern Ireland. As a consequence, individuals involved in this cruel practice rarely openly refer to badgers by name. They communicate in code or use slang terminology when referring to these beautiful and vulnerable animals. They often refer to badgers as 'pigs'. It is likely that this is because a male badger is called a 'boar' and a female is referred to as a 'sow', similar to pigs. USPCA has observed many suspects making reference to the hunting and killing of 'pigs'. In addition, the following emojis are regularly used 🐷🐖. Suspects have also been noted referring to badgers as 'black and whites' due to their distinctive black and white heads, or 'Geordies' (referencing Newcastle United FC) or Humbugs (referencing the black and white sweet). In addition, they are often referred to as 'smellies' and 'brocks'. It is imperative that anyone investigating badger persecution fully understands this terminology.

### Working Dog Shows

Offenders also meet and congregate at 'Working Dog' Shows and Events. Some of the activities carried out at these shows mirror badger baiting and the hunting of other mammals. An example of this is 'tunnel training'. It replicates the training of dogs to tunnel into a badger set for animal fighting (either foxes or badgers). In addition, attendees are known to participate in digging competitions.

---



Injured terrier abandoned in a badger sett and rescued by the USPCA

## The Dogs

### Breeds and Breeding

Individuals engaged in badger baiting keep and use a variety of breeds of dog. In addition, dogs are specifically cross bred for this purpose. The cross breeding often takes place to increase strength, stamina, speed and/or levels of aggression or 'gameness'. In essence dogs are being engineered for use in baiting and other forms of hunting.

The type or breed of dog will vary depending on their intended role. Small terriers such as Patterdales, Lakelands and sometimes Jack Russells are sent underground into a badger sett to locate a badger and hold it at bay. Other popular terrier breeds include Wheaten, Bedlington and Glen of Imaal. Other larger dogs, including Lurchers and Bull Lurchers are often used to fight with and kill the badger.

On many occasions, these dogs are bred by individuals who are actively involved in baiting. These dogs are bought, sold and swapped by various means, often on public and private Facebook groups. As an example, an individual may swap a Terrier for a Lurcher. Other dogs are procured from abroad. Such dogs are imported, and even exported in an attempt to breed even more aggressive dogs. This increases public safety risks regarding the people, including children who may come into contact with such dogs.

Examples of cross bred dogs most frequently seen in Northern Ireland (specifically for badger baiting and the hunting of other animals) include Bull-Lurchers, Wheaten/Pitbull and Patterdale/Jagd Terriers.

Bull Lurchers are often bred with the hope of producing a cross that has a sighthound's (Greyhound, Saluki, Whippet etc) speed and a bully's (American Pitbull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, Bulldogs etc) stamina, in order to use them for baiting and/or hunting. There are dozens of possible bull lurcher mixes. It should be noted that owning a Pitbull terrier is illegal in Northern Ireland.

Many of the individuals known to USPCA have several dogs, sometimes ten or more. The various breeds will have different roles in the persecution of badgers, foxes or other prey.

### Canine Fertility Clinics

A number of the individuals who breed or engineer the dogs intended for use in this barbaric activity use the services of Canine Fertility Clinics. These unlicensed and unregulated businesses pose further risks to the health and welfare of these poor animals. Individuals with no veterinary qualifications perform procedures such as entering a body cavity during artificial insemination, taking blood from animals or advocating the unlicensed use of medicines. Some of these practices are illegal. The British Veterinary Association has expressed concerns that the welfare of such dogs are not protected or respected.<sup>6</sup>

### Training

Great care and attention is taken to train the dogs that are destined to be used for badger baiting. These dogs will usually be introduced to hunting at a young age. They will be taught to hunt smaller mammals such as rats and mice, then rabbits or hares. They may then be used to hunt foxes before finally engaging in badger baiting. They often undergo various forms of exercise and/or agility training to build up strength and stamina. Specialist equipment including treadmills are used for this purpose.

---

## Injuries to the dogs

Many of the people involved in baiting purport to be and seem to regard themselves as dog lovers, ‘dog people’, ‘terrier men’. Despite this they treat these poor animals as merely a tool or a piece of equipment to be used in this cruel form of hunting.

Badgers that are the victim of this cruel practice will likely face a cruel and painful death. There are also significant risks to the poor dogs that are used. They can die from injuries received from the badger or can be trapped underground.

USPCA have seen many examples of dogs that bear the scars of their involvement in badger baiting and other forms of hunting. Typically, we see severe injuries to the lower jaw and the loss of teeth. These dogs are unlikely to receive the veterinary care needed as the perpetrators fear that their involvement in this activity will be discovered and reported to police or animal welfare. The badger baiters may attempt to treat the dogs themselves. This will likely mean the dog is more likely to die from its wounds or the suffering and scarring of the animal will be much worse.

In addition, we are aware of ‘hunters’ who kill their dogs when they fail to reach the standards they expect. This is not always done in the most humane way.

## Where they kept

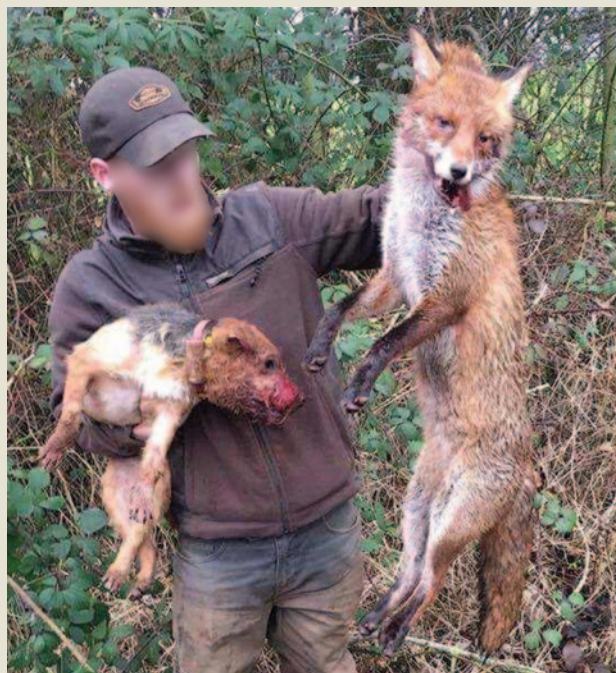
USPCA have observed that many individuals involved in badger baiting keep multiple dogs. They are often housed in unsatisfactory or cramped living conditions. This can be in small cages or pens within small urban dwelling houses or in sheds or outhouses. Some baiters purposely keep their dogs at locations or premises some distance away from their home address. This is particularly the case for dogs with fresh and healed injuries and scars related to hunting or baiting. This is to frustrate Police or Animal Welfare enforcement activities. A small number of rural based individuals are known to assist and facilitate badger baiting by providing accommodation for hunting and baiting dogs.



---

**Red terrier and bull lurcher with lower jaw injuries typical of those incurred in badger baiting**

---



Hobby hunter with his dog, showing off their latest kill

## The Hunting of Other Mammals

The individuals known to be involved in badger baiting are also engaged in the hunting of other mammals, primarily foxes, rabbits, hares and rodents, but also wild deer. While most of this activity is currently legal, extreme and unnecessary cruelty is carried out on a daily basis. Again, such hunting is often motivated primarily by the desire to kill other living creatures. These suspects are happy to openly discuss their kills and we often see photographs of them posing with multiple dead animals. Videos are posted on social media showing foxes and other animals being savaged by one or more dogs. These poor creatures often have a slow and painful death. This behaviour is not permitted in any other part of the United Kingdom.

USPCA has seen videos and photographs on social media of suspects holding or restraining foxes while they are being attacked or mauled by a dog. This behaviour is illegal. Even though foxes are not a protected animal in their own right, the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 makes it clear that an animal is protected under the Act if 'it is under the control of man whether on a permanent or temporary basis'. It is against the law to cause unnecessary suffering to any protected animal.

## Challenges to Enforcement

Statistics acquired by the BBC from the Department of Justice reveal that there have only been eleven prosecutions relating to killing or injuring wild animals in Northern Ireland since 2011. Fewer than three of these individuals were subsequently convicted. It is acknowledged that a small number of people have been prosecuted under animal welfare legislation for injuries suffered to the dog/dogs used in baiting or hunting. Considering the known scale of the problem, these shocking statistics further highlight considerable weaknesses in the investigation, enforcement and prosecution of these violent and barbaric offences.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have specific legislation relating to hunting with dogs.

In England and Wales, the Hunting Act 2004 criminalises certain forms of the hunting of wild mammals with dogs. There are a few exceptions, notably in respect of rats and rabbits. For the purposes of this Act a reference to a person hunting a wild mammal with a dog includes, in particular, any case where:

- a person engages or participates in the pursuit of a wild mammal, and
- one or more dogs are employed in that pursuit (whether or not by him and whether or not under his control or direction).

The Act creates five offences:

- Hunting a wild mammal with a dog (Section 1)
- Permitting land to be used for hunting a wild mammal with a dog (Section 3(1))
- Permitting a dog to be used for hunting a wild mammal with a dog (Section 3(2))
- Participating in, attending, facilitating or permitting land to be used for the purposes of a hare coursing event (Section 5(1); and
- Entering/permitting/handling a dog in a hare-coursing event (Section 5(2)).

In Scotland, hunting with dogs was banned earlier by the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002.

Not only does the absence of such legislation in Northern Ireland make it legal to cruelly hunt wild mammals such as foxes, with dogs, but it also provides a legal loophole for badger baiting offenders to use as an excuse for their (and their dogs) presence in fields where there are known to be occupied badger setts.





---

## Recommendations

### 1. Enforcement Action

USPCA is aware of more than 150 individuals who are involved in badger baiting and conservatively estimate that over 2000 badgers are illegally and cruelly killed each year. Only three people have been convicted of offences relating to killing or injuring wild animals in Northern Ireland since 2011. At present, the PSNI Wildlife Crime Unit does not have any investigative officers assigned to it and it is left to local officers to investigate any reports of badger baiting. This reactive approach is clearly ineffective in tackling the scourge of badger baiting in Northern Ireland. Given the scale of badger baiting and the level of suffering to badgers, dogs and other mammals, **it is recommended that PSNI add investigative capability to their Wildlife Crime Unit or establish a time limited taskforce to proactively investigate the activities of the known persons of interest.** Only in this way will it be possible to disrupt the organised crime groups engaged in badger baiting and take effective enforcement action against this most heinous and cruel crime.

As discussed earlier in this report, many badger baiting suspects have an innate need to photograph and/or record their kills. They like to share such media with like-minded individuals. **The seizure of computers, telephones, tablets etc should be a priority for officers investigating such offences,** in order to gather robust evidence which will strengthen the criminal case against suspects.

The injuries sustained by the dogs used for badger baiting are specific and unique. **It is recommended that vets from Great Britain with appropriate experience in diagnosing and dealing with injuries sustained in badger baiting are used as Expert Veterinary Witnesses, to strengthen the criminal case against suspects.** There are few if any local vets with such knowledge and they are at greater risk of intimidation.

Unlicensed and unregulated **Canine Fertility Clinics** pose risks to the health and welfare of dogs, including some used or intended to be involved in badger baiting and the hunting of other wild animals. Provisions within the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 make it an offence to carry out procedures on animals which should only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon. The USPCA contends that such procedures are being carried out in Canine Fertility Clinics and **enforcement action needs to be taken against them.**

---

### 2. Legislation to Ban Hunting Wild Mammals with Dogs

Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom without specific legislation relating to hunting with dogs. Public opinion, as evidenced through consultations and surveys, clearly supports a ban. The arguments against a ban are based on rural tradition and pest control. It is the USPCA view that the validity of such claims is tenuous at best, and that the cruelty involved far outweighs any supposed benefit. Killing defenceless wild animals with dogs is sadistic and cruel. The lack of a ban allows thousands of animals to be butchered purely for sport or as a hobby. In addition, it also provides a legal loophole or smokescreen for those engaged in illegal badger baiting. **The USPCA calls on MLAs to support legislation to ban hunting wild mammals with dogs.**

---

### 3. Raising Public Awareness to Address Underreporting of Badger Baiting

Badger baiting is significantly under reported. PSNI statistics have identified only 32 suspected badger baiting offences over the three-year period (2019 to 2021), a 60% decrease in recorded offences compared to the previous three-year period (2016-18).

USPCA provided PSNI with information relating to 36 suspected incidents over a 22-month period. This is more than the 32 offences recorded by PSNI over a three-year period. It is understood that these offences are not counted under Home Office Guidance.

**Consideration should be given to enhance publicity around badger baiting and ways to inform the public of what to look out for.**

**PSNI should review current guidance to ensure that all reported offences are recorded.**

---

## Appendices

### I - Operation BROCKWATCH

Incepted in 2019, Operation BROCKWATCH is a crime prevention strategy which aims to protect badgers in their natural habit, who are too often subjected to persecution here in Northern Ireland. Specifically, it identifies badger setts previously attacked by badger baiters and seeks to deter further attacks through signage and cameras. It was initiated by the USPCA and the Northern Ireland Badger Group (NIBG). To date it has proved 100% successful, with none of the badger setts within Operation BROCKWATCH being victim of further attacks.

### II - BBC Northern Ireland Spotlight Programme – Exposed: Hunting with Dogs

On 4 October 2022 BBC Northern Ireland aired an episode of Spotlight entitled “Exposed: Hunting with Dogs”.

The programme featured video footage of one group of badger baiters who were operating in County Down. The four males, carrying spades were filmed with a black Patterdale and two Wheaten terriers. As discussed earlier in this report, these breeds of dog are regularly used in badger baiting. The Patterdale appeared to be wearing a locator collar. The individuals visited three locations attempting to bait and kill badgers. At the last of these locations, the individuals parked in the grounds of Roselawn Cemetery before walking to a wooded area with the dogs. Squealing, believed to be from a badger was heard from this area. One of the males can be seen posing for a photograph, presumably intended for sharing on social media.

An examination of the location where the men had been revealed a hole that had recently been filled in. Evidence at the scene suggested that this was an active badger sett. The USPCA subsequently installed a camera which confirmed that the sett was at this time active and occupied by a number of badgers.

In response to the programme, the Countryside Alliance agreed that deliberate cruelty is completely unacceptable and was critical of the individuals featured and filmed. They stated that the programme ‘centred around a small group of individuals using terriers who, no matter what legalisation is in place, have no regard for the law, or relevant codes of practice for wildlife management’. They went on to say that ‘properly conducted hunting with hounds is a legitimate and humane form of wildlife management, vital for protecting both livestock, other wildlife and human health’.

Similarly, the Irish Working Terrier Federation (IWTF) criticised the ‘irresponsible behaviour’ of what they described as ‘a very small and unrepresentative minority of dog owners.’

While the activities of the individuals featured in this programme may not be completely representative of all persons involved in this cruel practice, it is not only a small group of people who are involved in ‘deliberate cruelty’ against badgers and other wild mammals. As previously mentioned, we are aware of more than 150 people who are involved in badger baiting. This is not only cruel, but illegal. The motivation for many of these known suspects is pure blood lust. In essence they are killing for fun and not to protect livestock, other wildlife or human health. As mentioned previously a number of the offenders come from and reside in urban areas.

It is acknowledged that farmers do have a need to protect their livestock, but this should be executed in the most humane way.

---

### III - Public Opinion

A public consultation<sup>7</sup> carried out by John Blair MLA (between December 2020 and February 2021) to inform a proposed Bill to ban hunting mammals with dogs received a very impressive 18,425 responses.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (78.16%) said that all hunting, searching, coursing, capturing or killing wild mammals with dogs should be banned in Northern Ireland. 79.6% of respondents said ‘terrier work’, the activity to use dogs to attack or cause the wild animal to flee from its cover, was unacceptable.
- 78.82% of respondents said the law should make landowners vicariously liable for any illegal hunting activity that takes place on their land, if the landowner has granted permission for the activity.
- 77.76% of respondents said people who make their dogs available for hunting, even if they don’t hunt themselves, should be liable to prosecution.
- Out of the 18,425 respondents, 14,397 supported the proposed Bill to outlaw hunting with dogs, including trail hunting. They felt the “sport” was barbaric and outdated, with no place in modern society.

As detailed above, legislation banning hunting with dogs is in place in the other nations of the United Kingdom. In 2008, the respected global leader in market research, Ipsos undertook two surveys<sup>8</sup> of over 2,000 people in Great Britain for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the RSPCA and the League Against Cruel Sports. The results of these surveys confirmed an overwhelming support for the legislation.

The first survey found that when people were asked about their views on whether certain — currently illegal — hunting activities should be made legal again, that on fox hunting, nearly three quarters, 73%, said fox hunting should remain illegal, while nearly a quarter, 22%, felt it should be made legal. Comparable figures for deer hunting were 81% vs 12% and for hare hunting and coursing 82% vs 12%.

The second survey asked whether people felt that those who currently take part in hunting with dogs — despite it being illegal — should be allowed to do so. Around seven in ten (71 %) said they believed that hunters should not be allowed to break the law, while 15% felt they should.

<sup>1</sup> Environment and Heritage Service (NI), Badgers & Development, [http://www.badgerland.co.uk/help/ni\\_eh\\_service\\_badgers.pdf](http://www.badgerland.co.uk/help/ni_eh_service_badgers.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Environment and Heritage Service (NI), Badgers & Development, [http://www.badgerland.co.uk/help/ni\\_eh\\_service\\_badgers.pdf](http://www.badgerland.co.uk/help/ni_eh_service_badgers.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Badger Survey of Northern Ireland (2007/08)

<sup>4</sup> The Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) – Badger Persecution Report (Northern Ireland 2016-18). Published October 2019

<sup>5</sup> Partnership For Action Against Wildlife Crime Northern Ireland - Badger Persecution Report 2016-18 (Public Version)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bva.co.uk>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.johnblairmla.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Blair-Consultation-Summary.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/public-opinion-hunting-dogs>



## USPCA – Protecting All Animals

### How You Can Help

The USPCA is a registered charity and receives no financial support from government. To continue our work we rely on the assistance of our members and friends. Would you be willing to support our work?

### Here are some ideas on ways to help.

DONATE	Regular or one-off donations are essential to our success.
ORGANISE AN EVENT	Put 'Fun' into fundraising by involving family and friends.
WEDDING FAVOURS	A 'Special Day' link between the two loves in your life, your partner and your pet.
DONATIONS IN LIEU OF FLOWERS	A tangible and valued tribute to a person's love of animals.
REMEMBER USPCA IN YOUR WILL	Legacies are the core of our funding. Without the foresight and support of our benefactors, projects such as our busy Animal Hospital would remain an aspiration.
VOLUNTEER	By giving your time and talent you can make a difference to the lives of abused and abandoned animals.
MEMBERSHIP	Join the USPCA and be part of a strong movement to protect animals.

### Thank you

For further information visit our website [www.uspca.co.uk](http://www.uspca.co.uk) Email us on [headoffice@uspca.co.uk](mailto:headoffice@uspca.co.uk) or telephone **028 3025 1000**.



Ulster Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals  
Unit 5/6 Carnbane Industrial Estate  
Newry BT35 6QH

NI Charity Number. NIC102755.