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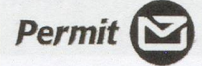
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HELVE⁺IA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

The European Badger

The European Badger is a mammal indigenous to most of Europe and to many parts of Asia. It is a member of the Mustelidae family, and so is related to stoats, otters and weasels.

The general hue of its fur is grey above and black on the under parts with a distinctive black and white striped face and white-tipped ears. European badgers are around 70 cm long with a tail of about 20 cm and weigh 10 kg on average, but weights can vary enormously. Badgers do not hibernate, although in areas with cold winter climates they may become torpid for two or so days at a time. They have to put on fat in the autumn to help them get through the winter months. In parts of Russia, badgers have been reported to weigh up to 42 kg in autumn.

Badgers are effectively omnivorous; most of their diet consists of earthworms, although they also eat insects, beetles, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, eggs, young birds, berries, roots, bulbs, nuts, fruit and other plant matter, depending on the season. They also dig up the nests of wasps and bumblebees in order to eat the larvae.

Badgers prefer grazed pasture and woodland, which have high numbers of earthworms exposed,

and dislike clay soil, which is difficult to dig even with their powerful claws. In urban areas, some badgers scavenge food from bins and gardens.

Badgers are nocturnal and spend the day in their setts, or extensive networks of tunnels dug in well-drained ground (or sometimes beneath buildings or



The European Badger or Dachs

roads). Setts give shelter from the weather and predators, including humans and dogs. Badgers are territorial, but can be found in groups often called clans. Group size varies between 2 to 12. Each clan has a dominant male and female which are often (but not always) the only members of the clan to reproduce. Badgers have a gestation period of 7-8 weeks and give birth to 1-5 offspring. Males are called boars and females sows; the young

are cubs. Badgers live for up to 15 years (average 3 years) in the wild, and up to 19 years in captivity. If they survive their first year, the most common cause of death is by road traffic.

Badgers can catch and carry rabies and are believed to transmit bovine tuberculosis.

Badgers occur throughout Switzerland, although not above 1800 m above sea level. About 1500 badgers are hunted each year, and in some cantons farmers are compensated for crop damage.

Wikipedia and other sources