



Friends of Barnfield Sandbeds Wildlife Spotters Guide



ANIMALS



BADGER

There have been badgers living in the Sandbeds for many years. The sandy soil makes it easy for them to dig their underground homes called SETTS. There are a number of chambers underground linked by a network of tunnels. Badgers are NOCTURNAL and very wary of human beings so you are not likely to see one in the daytime but there will be

many signs of their activities which you can look for.

Look for their footprints in soft sand. They are wider than they are long. Badgers need to drink water so the damp edges of the pond are good places to look. It is also easy to follow their tracks after fresh snowfall. Notice how their back footprint overlaps the front ones. Other signs that badgers may be living in the area are scratch marks on tree trunks. This is where they have been cleaning the mud off their feet before returning to the sett. It is also a way of scent-marking, letting other badgers know that this is their territory.

Look also by the entrances to the sett. You may see bundles of bedding which the badgers have dragged out to air. They like to change their bedding frequently to keep the sett smelling fresh.



FOX



There are nearly always a pair of foxes living in the Sandbeds. They live underground in a home called an EARTH. Look at the difference in shape between the entrance hole of the fox compared with the badger. The fox is taller than the badger and therefore needs an entrance which is taller than it is wide, whereas the squat shape of the badger requires an entrance which is wider than it is high. Foxes are also NOCTURNAL but, unlike badgers, may be seen in the

daytime, especially in Spring when feeding young.

Country foxes are generally “meat-eaters” and will catch rabbits, small rodents such as mice and voles, ground-nesting birds and virtually anything they come across. They will raid dust bins and find rich pickings on rubbish tips and anywhere we humans throw out waste food. You will be able to identify a fox’s earth due to the fox’s habit of leaving the remains of their food outside their front door. You will see bones, feathers, birds’ wings and all kinds of other inedible bits. There is also a very distinctive rank smell where a fox has been.



GREY SQUIRREL



You may see grey squirrels in almost any patch of woodland throughout England. They were introduced from North America in the mid 19th century and have spread prolifically, becoming a nuisance to foresters by stripping the bark off trees and, being bigger and more robust, competing for food with the native red squirrel and causing its serious decline.

Look for their “dreys”. This is the name for the ball-shaped bundles of twigs high up in the fork of a tree in which they sleep. You can tell the difference between a squirrel’s drey and a similarly shaped magpie’s nest because the squirrel usually uses twigs with leaves still attached, whereas magpies only use bare twigs.

Spring is a good time to look for squirrels when they are so busy chasing each other round and round the tree trunks, they may not notice you.



RABBIT

You will almost certainly see signs of the presence of rabbits as you walk round the Sandbeds. You may even catch sight of one if you walk slowly and quietly. Rabbits like to live together in family groups. They are never far away from their home, which is called a



warren, so that they can quickly dash to safety if a predator such as a fox or buzzard suddenly appears.

They were brought to Britain about 800 years ago for their fur and meat, but some of them escaped into the countryside where they quickly made themselves at home and multiplied rapidly. They eat grass and many other kinds of plants and are a great nuisance to farmers and gardeners. Unfortunately, they have eaten many of the flowers and shrubs we have planted to enhance the Sandbeds.

HEDGEHOG

The Sandbeds, with its overgrown and secretive areas is an ideal habitat for the shy, NOCTURNAL hedgehog. During the daytime it sleeps in a nest of grass and dry leaves and comes out at night to forage for beetles, earthworms, caterpillars, slugs and snails.

Their prickly spines are a good deterrent against most predators but are no protection from road traffic or badgers which, with their strong claws, can turn hedgehogs inside out.

During Winter the hedgehog builds a special nest and HIBERNATES. We have made some



hibernacula to encourage them. During hibernation their body processes slow right down, almost to a standstill.

Their temperature drops and their heart beats slow to only 20 times a minute. Never disturb a hibernating hedgehog for it needs time to wake up and warm up slowly and it will die if it is panicked. If you are lucky enough to have one in your garden you can feed it dog or cat food and give it water to drink. NEVER give it bread and milk.