

Old Brock in the parish



‘You’re doing what?’ exclaimed my giggling daughter. I repeated, in hushed tones: ‘I can’t really talk now, I am conducting a badger survey.’ I’m not sure whose surprise was the greater - hers on hearing what her father was doing, or mine to receive a call from her. Fortunately, both were very pleasant. Under the guidance of Tony Hutson, a small group of us met one late spring morning last year in the Half Moon car park (the relevance of which would become apparent), to conduct one in a series of surveys of badger setts within the parish. These surveys are conducted every ten years or so, to gauge the state of our whiskery, crepuscular fellow parishioners. Another reason was to remind me of that wonderful word crepuscular (used to describe animals active at dusk and at dawn. I have struggled to find everyday uses for it ever since). As part of the project, we would revisit known sites (setts) from previous surveys and follow up on more recent information or indications of their presence.

I was new to this and so had little idea what to look for. Our first stop was next to a path I regularly use, but when shown the signs, I started to see it all rather differently. Yes, I had seen the odd hole before, but on this occasion, I noticed that in fact there were a series of holes – or, rather, entrances – and that they were all connected. It being that time of year, there was much evidence of the setts having had a spring clean. All the winter bedding had been excavated and, rather than being hung out for a good airing, the mixture of twigs, leaves and sheep wool had been left out, by the entrances, as if waiting for collection by the Lewes recycling team. Among many other interesting facts, I learnt that badgers like their privacy and hygiene too. They have their own latrines, which surround the setts. Some had, very obviously, been recently used.

I learnt that a sett will typically be towards the centre of a ‘clan’s’ home range. The setts are usually situated in or near small clearings in woodland or copses, where trees or their roots provide the badger with some form of protection. Of those we saw, the majority were on slopes, as well as in chalky soil, presumably to aid drainage, and were perhaps easier to build. A simple sett is made up of a single tunnel, with a sleeping chamber at the end. However, most setts have several entrances and numerous tunnels that link up with each other. The tunnels also link up with sleeping and nursery

chambers. The tunnels maybe arranged so as to provide a constant supply of clean fresh air through the sett in most weathers. Accordingly, entrances may sometimes be on different levels, to help stale air rise through the sett and be dissipated into the surrounding woodland.

About 20 such sites have been checked so far, and there are still a few on the Downs and some parts of East Chiltington that we did not manage to complete. Most known sites surveyed (on the southern boundary of the parish) have so far shown evidence of current activity (including one or two that were thought to be vacated on the last survey, in 2010), and one or two seem to have been more recently vacated.

At the end of that enthralling morning, it was necessary to compare notes and collate the information over a well-earned pint. I thoroughly enjoyed and surprised myself (as well as my family), and am looking forward to doing it again. There is still the need to complete the survey, and this will be carried out when the badgers become active again in the spring, perhaps late March. Anyone who wants to join us would be most welcome. A full report will be compiled when the survey is completed. This will not be published, in view of the sensitivity about the location of badger setts, but a summary of the results will be made available.

PECWG carries out many other surveys of different wildlife and activities that Plumpton and East Chiltington residents can partake in. These are just some of many ways to celebrate our beautiful parish – the pint at the end is another. Watch this space or visit our website for more information.

plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com

Let's hope for a Happy New Year and a clean Bevern!

Ben Drummond

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