

ASSIGNMENT 224 TASK 1

ASSIGNMENT BRIEF

Task 1

Produce a poster for three wild animals agreed with your tutor, (Badgers, Fox's and Squirrels) explaining their feeding behaviour and habits (including main food source), sleep/wake cycle and physical adaptations.

BADGERS

Big families, big appetites and big personalities. Badgers are a wood's ruling clan, often occupying the same sett for generations and laying a network of well-trodden paths through the undergrowth. They're playful, house proud and expert foragers.



What do badgers look like?

With its characteristic black and white-striped face, grey fur and short furry tail, the badger looks like no other UK mammal. Stocky, powerfully-built creatures, they typically weigh 10–12kg, with a body length of about 90cm. This makes them the biggest land predator in the UK.



What do badgers eat?

Badgers are omnivores, which means they will eat a wide range of food. Around 80% of a badger's diet is made up of earthworms – they can eat hundreds of them in a single night – but they also eat slugs and other invertebrates.

Fruit features in the badger's diet too, including pears, apples, plums and elderberries. Elder bushes can often be found growing near badger setts. When earthworms are scarce, badgers will eat small mammals like voles and rabbits. They are also the main predator of hedgehogs in the UK. Badgers locate food using their keen sense of smell and sharp claws that are ideal for digging.

The staple food of badgers is usually earthworms which generally make up around 80% of their diet. They can eat several hundred worms each night. But being omnivorous, they will eat almost anything, from flesh and fruit to bulbs and birds' eggs.

Although the bulk of their diet is made up of earthworms, they also eat slugs and insects and have a keen sense of smell and sharp claws that can root up grubs from under the soil surface.

Fruit also features on the menu, including apples, pears, plums and elderberries - you can often find elder bushes growing near to the setts. They will eat nuts, seeds and acorns along with crops like wheat and sweetcorn.

Badgers are known to eat small animals including mice, rats, rabbits, frogs, toads, and hedgehogs, and may take advantage of animal carcasses and carrion they come across. Their keen sense of smell and long claws are well adapted to locating and digging into the burrows and nests of small mammals. In times of food shortage, badgers may also raid bins in search of food.



How do badgers breed?

Badgers live in social groups, typically made up of around four to seven individuals. Mating occurs year-round, predominantly between February and May. During courtship, the male badger will pursue the female, biting the nape of her neck.

After mating, a process known as delayed implantation occurs. This means cubs will not be born until January or February, regardless of when mating took place.

Youngsters will stay underground for around two months before first emerging. Cubs typically reach maturity at just over one year old. Some will stay with the family, while others will disperse to find new territory.

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Where do badgers live?

Badgers are found across the UK, with the highest numbers in southern England. Ideal badger habitat is a mixture of woodland and open country.

The species lives in a network of underground burrows and tunnels know as a sett. Each badger territory will include a main sett and several smaller outlying setts. The main sett is the group's headquarters, where they spend most of their time and rear their young. Outlying setts are smaller and provide a safe place to retreat to if needed when badgers are out foraging. Setts tend to be located in the shelter of woodland, with the badgers emerging at night to forage in fields and meadows. Though not as common as urban foxes, badgers can also survive in towns and cities, providing there is suitable cover in which to dig their setts, and nearby gardens and parks where they can hunt for food.



Signs and spotting tips

Badgers are strictly nocturnal and extremely wary of humans. Follow our spotting tips for your best chance of sighting them.

- Time of day/time of year: Badgers are nocturnal and rarely seen in the day. During warm summer weather they may emerge from the sett a short while before sunset.
- Setts: One of the best ways to spot a badger is to locate a sett and quietly wait for the inhabitants to emerge, usually around dusk. Position yourself downwind of the sett if possible, as this will prevent the badgers from picking up your scent. Always maintain a respectful distance when badger watching as these are shy animals and it is against the law to disturb them and their setts.
- Tracks: Keep an eye out for badger tracks when visiting the woods – they might just lead you to a badger sett! Badger prints are fairly distinctive: they have kidney-shaped pads, five upward-pointing toes and long claws.
- Scat: Badgers often deposit their scat (poo) in communal areas known as latrines. These are often located at the border between the territories of different groups. Look out for areas of disturbed ground with scat deposited in small holes.



Threats and conservation

Historical persecution means badgers are now fully protected by law. This has helped the UK population to grow, roughly doubling since the 1980s. However, many badgers are killed by cars and illegal persecution does still occur.

There are also concerns by some that badgers are responsible for spreading bovine tuberculosis to cattle. This has led to badger culls taking place in certain areas.



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FOX'S

A born survivor with a bushy tail. Ever adaptable, the fox is equally at home in our woods or city streets. It sits top of the woodland food chain with a diet that takes in everything from birds and beetles to rabbits and rats.

What do foxes look like?

Russet-red fur, pointed ears and a bushy tail make the fox unmistakable. Often smaller than people imagine, they typically weigh 5–8 kg and stand around 40cm at the shoulder.

Quick facts

Common names: fox, red fox

Scientific name: *Vulpes vulpes*

Family: Canidae

Habitat: woodland, farmland, upland, urban

Diet: rabbits, rodents, birds, invertebrates, fruit and berries

Predators: adults have no natural predators in the UK.

Origin: native



What do foxes eat?

Foxes are opportunistic omnivores and this allows them to survive in a wide range of habitats. Rabbits and field voles are common prey, but a fox's diet can include everything from worms and beetles to deer fawns and fruit. Urban foxes still hunt live prey, but will also take advantage of any food discarded by people.

How do foxes breed?

Foxes are social animals and live in loose family groups. These are normally made up of a breeding male, female and their young.

Mating takes place in winter and this is when foxes are at their most vocal, barking and screeching loudly as they look to attract a mate and fend off rivals.

Come spring, the female will give birth to a litter of cubs in an underground den. Normally, four or five cubs will be born and they will be cared for by both the male and female.

By autumn, the cubs are fully self-sufficient. Some will leave to establish their own territories, while others may remain with the family group. Those that stay sometimes help their parents to raise the following year's young.

Did you know?

Foxes have complicated relationships with badgers. Sometimes the two species will compete for food, but they have also been recorded living alongside each other in badger setts.

Where do foxes live?

Foxes are found throughout the UK and can survive in most habitats. The number of foxes in an area varies depending on the amount of food available. In urban areas, where food is often plentiful, a fox's territory may be as small as 25 hectares. In upland Scotland, where food is much harder to come by, a territory could be as large as 4,000 hectares.

Signs and spotting tips

Foxes are present in most of our woods, but your best chance of seeing one may well be in a town or city. Urban foxes often become accustomed to humans, allowing you to get good views. Rural foxes tend to be much wavier and are harder to see. Foxes are crepuscular, meaning they are most active around dawn and dusk, but it is not unusual to see them during the day, especially in urban areas.



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SQUIRRELS

Recognition: Silver-grey, agouti (speckled) coat, with a brownish tinge on feet, face and along the back, especially in summer; tail conspicuously fringed white. Much larger than the red squirrel, which has uniform reddish-brown (not agouti) fur.

Size: 24-28.5 cm. Tail length: 19.5-24 cm

Weight: Females 0.4-0.72 kg, males 0.44-0.65 kg



Distribution & Habitat

Introduced from the USA between 1876-1929 the Grey squirrel is now widespread in England and Wales, central Scotland and the eastern half of Ireland, and still spreading. Grey squirrels are essentially animals of deciduous woodland. Squirrels are indigenous to the Americas, Eurasia, and Africa and have been introduced to Australia. Unlike rabbits or deer, squirrels cannot feed upon cellulose and must rely on foods rich in protein, carbohydrates and fat. In temperate regions, early spring is the hardest time of year for squirrels because buried nuts begin to sprout and are no longer available for the squirrel to eat and new food sources have not become available yet. During these times squirrels rely heavily on the buds of trees. The tree squirrel's diet consists primarily of a wide variety of plant food; this includes nuts, seeds, conifer cones, fruits, fungi and green vegetation. However some squirrels also consume meat, especially when faced with hunger. Squirrels have been known to eat insects, eggs and young birds.

Behaviour

Squirrels are diurnal, usually with peaks of activity in the early morning and late afternoon. They are not territorial, but share home ranges and temporally abundant food sources. They typically make a nest (drey) of twigs (cut, live from the tree, often with the leaves attached, unlike bird nests). Dreys are usually tucked in a fork against the trunk, though squirrels also use large holes in trees as drey sites.

Grey squirrels are essentially animals of deciduous woodland, and are dependant upon the large seeds of such trees as oak, beech, hazel, sweet chestnut and walnut. In Autumn, when abundant, these seeds are stored, often underground. Because deciduous fruit falls to the ground in autumn, grey squirrels spend much more time foraging on the ground, and burying fruits there, than red squirrels. Grey squirrels' main predators include stoats, goshawks and foxes.



Diet and Feeding

Large seeds of trees such as oak, beech, hazel, sweet chestnut and walnut. When these supplies run out in early summer grey squirrels turn to a variety of flowers, buds, shoots, pine cones, fungi, peanuts from bird feeders, birds' eggs and young. Grey squirrels mainly eat seeds and plant buds, shoots, fungi and flowers, but will also eat insects and birds' eggs. They'll also take food from bird feeders in gardens.

Squirrels will retrieve nuts they've buried mainly using their sense of smell, but they also have some form of a mental map of locations. Many of the nuts and seeds buried aren't rediscovered, which helps the growth of new plants.

Reproduction

The female can have two litters a year, in early spring and summer. Young squirrels are born blind and hairless, in litters of 3-4, after a gestation of 44 days. Lactation lasts up to 10 weeks, though the young start to take solid food after about 8 weeks. They can breed at 10-12 months old.

Conservation status