

environment underpins the economy. Many are therefore justifying the environment in terms of its economic benefits. Whilst this may be important in short term discussions, in the long term it is far more important that it is the economy that is re-shaped to better reflect environmental realities. A local economy must deliver growth in natural capital; otherwise it is not delivering “growth” at all.

This line of reasoning is closely aligned to the “Forum for the Future” 5 capitals model. At present growth is traditionally measured in terms of growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – essentially a turnover measure. In practice people do not measure their prosperity in terms of turnover. They may, however, measure it in terms of their stock of capital (crudely – the amount of “stuff” they have). Capital, in turn, falls into 5 categories: natural capital, human capital, social capital, manufactured capital and financial capital. Clearly these are all linked, but they are all reliant on natural capital. So, natural capital has primacy. No growth in natural capital means no growth. In this respect we are still trying to emerge from a recession that has lasted well over 100 years (not merely since 2008).

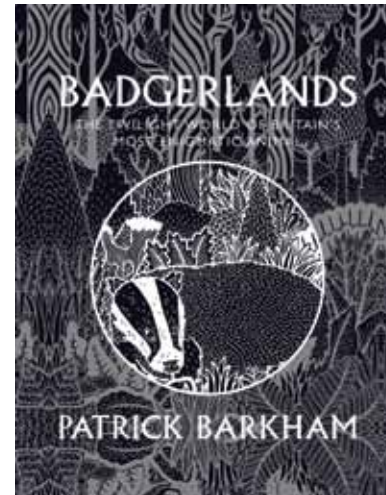
I am not sure how much the LNPs will engage in these more fundamental discussions. On the one hand LNPs were set up by government and confirmed by Defra, so would seem to be the government’s creatures. And there also seems to be an unspoken sub-plot that the LNPs should be unlocking development and economic growth by overcoming environmental constraints. On the other hand there has been virtually no guidance on what a LNP should be, no government funding to deliver them (so no ‘carrot’) and government was very clear that it wanted areas to set up bodies that were appropriate to the location. Therefore government should not be surprised if, having promoted the establishment of environmental partnerships, that is exactly what they get. So in my view it should be the other way around – LNPs should be overcoming development and economic constraints in order to unlock growth in natural capital.

Tony Whitbread is Chief Executive of Sussex Wildlife Trust. tonywhitbread@sussexwt.org.uk

Bad(ger)lands

It is not Broc who is enigmatic, it is the process by which we try to make a complex situation simple, and cull a species we’ve just given full protection in law.

MARTIN SPRAY



Is the badger Britain’s most enigmatic animal, as the subtitle of a recent book suggests?¹ *Badgerlands*, by the journalist Patrick Barkham, provides the focus for this article. Interesting, entertaining, and elusive the badger may be, but it is also the object of considerable hype. I wouldn’t deny that badgers are delightful. When cubs bump into you as they romp, and accept you as part of the furniture, that is glow-time. The tentative emergence of an adult snout from the sett, if you haven’t experienced it before (but for some people the excitement is repeated as often as the snout), is a thrill. Yet, watching an earth for a fox’s sometimes impetuous exit can be just as thrilling, and more precious, perhaps, for being less often experienced.

And I am seldom more amazed by wildlife (the larger sorts) than when watching the actions of grey squirrels...

An equally suitable subtitle for the book could be ‘The twilight world of Britain’s most enigmatic badger-watcher’. Patrick Barkham, writer for *The Guardian*, is grandson of badger-friend and campaigner, and author of *Through the badger gate* (1974), Jane Ratcliffe. In spite of this family heritage, the accounts of his first, naive, and (just like mine) unproductive badger watches he amuses us with were very recent events in his life.

Badgerlands has accounts of his observations, and snippets of information on badger natural history and biology. Such snippets occur throughout the book, but this is not a systematic study of badgers, and its title does not indicate that it is a summary of where Britain’s badgers are especially likely to be found. Rather, it is a report of a personal gaining of understanding of what badgers are up to in twenty-first century Britain, of where they stand, of who is interested in them, and of who would be happy – and who relieved but not happy – to watch the last badger expire. It was written in the fetid context of Broc’s dismal implication with bovine tuberculosis.

Food for thought

The search for badgerlands takes the author to various parts of the country, some of which are not usually identified with badgers, amongst them Wookey Hole,

Wytham Woods (“home to at least 220 of the best-studied badgers in the world”), a Wolverhampton canal corridor, a wood near Built Wells, a Cornish garden, and a Bristol back-street. We are shown around sanctuaries, and glimpse something of arch badger defender Brian May (he of Queen). We are shown into parts of the lives of less celebrated badger enthusiasts, and meet a variety of Barkham’s contacts and hosts, some of whom enjoy the animals without bribery, others who tempt badgers with a few peanuts, and others again who provide their animals with banquets of sausage and sandwiches.

Food also features in a sort of interlude in the book. Barkham sits down to lunch with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable naturalist... not to discuss matters of ecological, behavioural, or veterinarian significance: he wants to know what badger tastes like. His host cooks a road-kill. “It was not greasy, and nothing like pork, but it reeked as strongly as rancid venison or a cheap cut from a billy goat of pensionable age.” That is interesting, but not entirely necessary information, exemplifying, I think, how a ‘light’ manner of writing can easily tip into flippancy. For me, it nearly does in some other chapters as well. On the other hand, one might say that it is such details that make the book invitingly lively.

Persecuted and sentimentalised

Part of that liveliness is the weaving in of a wider context. We see persecuted badgers in John Clare’s poetry, and badgers sentimentalised in *Wind in the Willows*. We are given sobering details of the starkly serious effects on people of outbreaks of bTB, though the implications, and the search for ways out are only sketched. Making it clear that he was only a visitor to the badgerlands of Britain’s farmland, Barkham admits that he is a ‘sensory tourist’, pointing out the gulf between those whose livelihood is from working the land, and those for whom it is not.

He stresses that there is quite a long tradition of persecution of badgers in Britain, in the name of sport as well as of pest control. Barkham devotes a chapter to a badger-digging, and the subsequent trial of the diggers. I found the background he sketches here especially interesting: the pride that some diggers and baiters have for their dogs’ ‘courage’, and their sadness at their dogs’ pain; the cruelty to a terrified wild animal, yet at the same time feelings for their fortitude; some – but some others are malevolently sadistic. Then there is the embeddedness of badger digging and torturing in our countryside ‘heritage’, other parts of which many conservationists wish to defend.

A rapidly progressing scheme?

British badgers are said today to be more numerous than at any time in history, and the UK and Irish populations, numerically, are the most important in Europe. “It was not”, wrote Roger Lovegrove in his history of the persecution of Britain’s birds and mammals, *Silent Fields*, “always thus. For centuries the Badger was hunted mercilessly and it is small wonder sometimes that it survived at all.” Indeed, in the 1840s its extinction here was soberly predicted. With public attitudes mellowing, the badger became a species fully protected in law in 1992, although subsequent breaches of protection have been covered by invoking Crown immunity.



A badger patrol in Somerset at work to scrutinise and shadow the area’s pilot badger cull.

Photo: Owen Newman

“The national scheme for eradication of bovine tuberculosis is progressing rapidly”, said the *Agricultural Notebook* in 1958. Alas, in 1971 the badger’s involvement with bTB was indicated, since when it has shown itself as *bête noire*: the most important British wildlife carrier of bTB. Not the only one, of course, but that is seldom mentioned... In this context, I wonder if a better subtitle for the book might be ‘The twilight world of Britain’s handling of troublesome animals’. It is often maintained that the badger-and-bTB saga is essentially a matter of science, and that science will handle the finding of a means of combatting the disease. If so, it is rum science. The situation (Barkham uses Lord John Krebs’s word), is “mindless”. Not what one usually says of a scientific investigation.

X and Y: as easy as A-B-C?

After the trials of the removal of badgers in the past few years, we seem still not to know – let alone know how to predict – the basic consequences of a cull: might it reduce the incidence of TB in cattle; or cause a diaspora of badgers, some infected; might it cause an increase of TB in cattle; or might it cause an inflow of badgers, some infected? There is little sense of agreement on the basis for evaluating such things, let alone of actually agreeing on them.

Barkham, with journalistic efficiency, gives enough detail to make his story clear; and gives enough of each side of the chasm of controversy over the decision to cull/kill x badgers in a Somerset ‘trial’ area and y in West Gloucestershire. He *almost* maintains a balance of opinion pro and con. However, the book was published before the trial ran into the slough. x and y turn out to be variables, sampled from

the populations X and Y. y, for instance, was 708, although the target-y is/was 1,650. Y is/was 3,644, then 3,368, then 2,350. The 708 figure is the number 'cilled' during the allowed time, but as ('tis said) the badgers moved the goal-posts, extra time was played, and as y looks still off-target the game may (as it were) change from soccer to rugby – or perhaps the Eton Wall Game.

X and Y have changed in time, from October 2012 to February to just before the cull began in autumn 2013. It is said this could be because the population in both areas may have fallen from around 8,000 in October 2012 to about 4,000 a year later. Defra has suggested several reasons, but anti-trial campaigners have added to these the thought that, as Dominic Dyer of Care for the Wild put it, "a climate has been created which allows certain individuals to believe they can carry out illegal killing and will not get prosecuted" and a few farmers may have carried out their own personal culls. Without a quite strong reason, a 50% fall in one year looks unusual. But, with or without, this x-and-y business appears to be based on weak methodology. The story is far from finished.

The story is far from simple

Badgerlands is to be recommended because of its humanness, and the clear ease with which it is written. Other sources are needed to provide a natural history of the animal – that is to be expected. It is a pity, however, that some parts of the story Barkham tells are not presented in more detail. For instance, the feeding of wild animals and the changing of their behaviour: this is touched on, and frowned upon a little, but it is not discussed with any thoroughness - yet it would seem to be central to our relationship with 'the wild'. The same point is, for instance, currently part of the discussion about wild boar in the Forest of Dean. And this leads to a bigger issue.

Can we and should we disentangle animal welfare and nature conservation matters? With the present interest (small and select though it still is) in 'wilding', this distinction is something, I think, that needs careful attention. So far, locally, the badger part of the badger-and-bTB story has been largely about the animals, not about their habitats and their ecology. There have been only occasional murmurs about changes in farming itself. For the majority of people who are sympathetic but not involved in anti-cull actions, badgers remain objects of sentimental curiosity. If they are met with, it is usually as fragments at the roadside. Otherwise, I think, they are for many people an occasional entertainment.

References

1. *Badgerlands. The twilight world of Britain's most enigmatic animal*, by Patrick Barkham, Granta, 2013, 389 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-1-84708-504-7.

Martin Spray is at spraypludds@hotmail.com