



Badger

Prairie Excavators

If you're a connoisseur of animal stories – fact or fiction – you'll dig this. Anecdotal accounts have a badger excavating its way through blacktop in one instance and an inch or so of concrete in another.

Make no mistake, the badger is a terrific digger, maybe the most accomplished of any animal in North America. Yet, while the blacktop/concrete examples may be up for debate, the badger has no problem clawing its way through compacted prairie soils.

With sturdy limbs and long, strong claws, the badger is suited for digging, which it does with vigor in its pursuit of prey such as ground squirrels and pocket gophers. And while the badger has few rivals, it will quickly dig to escape when need be, showering those in pursuit with dirt.

Adult badgers are about 22-28 inches long, females are slightly smaller, and weigh from 14-26

pounds. This grizzled buff and gray animal is unmistakable in appearance thanks to the black and white stripes on its head.

Adult badgers are mostly nocturnal, which means they do much of their foraging at night and remain underground during the day. Then again, it's not uncommon to see both young and adult animals during daylight hours searching for prey.

Badgers are found in grasslands, semi-open areas and cultivated lands. Regardless of where you find them, badgers typically leave plenty of evidence around to signal their whereabouts. Freshly-dug holes and large mounds of dirt scattered about are typically sure signs of badger activity.

Badgers are solitary animals except during the breeding season. Wildlife biologists tell us that badgers mate in summer, and that females breed in their first year of life while most

males will not mate until year two. Young are born underground, but not until the following spring, thanks to a delayed gestation period.

Badger cubs remain in underground dens for about four to five weeks. If the den is disturbed, the female badger quickly digs another elsewhere. At about 10-12 weeks, the family breaks up, and movement of young during this time is erratic and can be extensive.

It's at this time that young badgers are often seen traveling through areas where the species is not commonly found. Some have even been known to travel nearly 40 miles from their birth dens in search of home ranges, which, for such a stubby-legged predator, is maybe as notable as digging through blacktop.

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