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How To Photograph Badgers - by Wildlife Photographer Kevin Keatley



I have photographed badgers for many years and over that time I've worked out ways to get better and closer pictures. I have outlined below some key points that I hope may help you do the same.

Photographing badgers can be very challenging - fieldwork and technical; but when it all goes right it can be fantastic. I am always on a high when I've been lucky enough to see a badger and even higher if I've managed to take a picture. At times I have had to forget the camera and just watch when badger cubs have been too close to focus and adult badgers have been happily grooming and scratching just a few feet away. They have been so relaxed that for a moment I have felt part of the family. These are the types of pictures I want - natural, relaxed and eye to eye. Bring in some background with autumn leaves or blue bells to show the season and you have a whole picture, a moment in time.

Equipment

A short zoom lens is ideal, 28-70mm, 70 - 210mm or 75 - 300mm. This gives the flexibility to frame the picture and crop out any distracting branches etc. It's also a great plus if you want to zoom in on anything as I did with the wood mouse.

Two or more flash guns used off camera to avoid red eye. They can be connected by wire or used with slave cells. I put some white/opaque plastic over the flash heads to soften the feel and cut down on shadows. Thin plastic bags from your local supermarket deli counter are perfect. I set up with the flashes in a curve with the main flash on a tripod approx. One metre from the camera. The other flashes are on the other side of the camera strapped to branches.



Metering



I use the camera on manual and do a set of test shots in my garden every time I change any equipment (my daughter's badger slippers are ideal for this). I set the camera at f7.1 to f11 which gives a good depth of field at around 2mt. With badger photography you may only take 2 or 3 pictures in an evening (sometimes none!) and you don't have the luxury of bracketing.

Setting Up

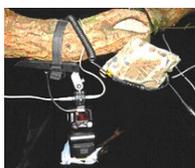
If you regularly put down food the badgers will become less wary, some peanuts and peanut butter in just the right places will allow you to choose your background and setting.

Don't rush to get a picture as soon as a badger comes into view. They are very cautious at first, but once they find the peanuts you should get the opportunity. Get down to their level and focus on the eyes. A picture taken in this way will give you a real feeling of being there.

During the late spring and summer the badgers come out before dark and you will be able to focus without a light, but at other times I use a torch fixed to the main flash tripod. Carry some clear plastic bags to put over flash guns if it rains. I've taken some good pictures just after a shower has passed.

Digital Update

I now use digital cameras and have Canon and Nikon kit. The camera I use most is a Nikon D300 with 16-85 lens. I use the camera on manual and have an F stop of 7.1 to 11 depending on the distance and zoom. The ISO speed is usually 250 and shutter speed the same. As with the set up for film, I have the flashes in a curve around the camera. Normally, I use 3 or 4 flashes - three linked to the camera by wire and one fired by a slave cell. I have tried wireless flashes, but found it only works if the flash guns are in front of the camera; as I'm usually lying down and trying to get as close as I can, I have to work with the flashes wired up. Setting the flash guns to manual and half power gives you full lighting control and setting to half power gives you faster recycle time so you don't miss any opportunities. I'm normally waiting around for a while, but if a badger comes by, I can take a couple of photos in quick succession.



Whenever I change my equipment, I always do a few test shots to get the right lighting and work out what F stops I can use. The smaller the aperture (larger number), the greater depth of field and more of your photo will be in focus. The limiting factor would be the flash output, but using four flash guns gives you that power and if your subject is close enough, you can

reduce the flash power to give you the quick recycle time. The flashes can be set to standby (unlike the infra red tips where the camera is going to be left). If I think I'm likely to take a photo, I will just press the shutter halfway down which will wake the flashes up and be ready to fire.

After many years of wildlife photography, I still find it a magical experience photographing badgers. It's the whole experience - waiting for them to come out, how many and will they stay around for a while. It's also the sound of the forest, the trees rustling and the tawny owls hooting. In the winter woods, there is nothing better than looking up at the stars through the leafless trees.



While waiting for the badgers to come out, try putting your camera on the ground facing up. Use a cable release and set your camera to the 'B' setting (open shutter). The photo was taken with a F stop of 4, lens at 28mm and a time of 9 minutes with a few seconds of torch light to give a bit of colour. The star trail shows the rotation of the earth and the different colours/brightness of the stars show their temperature and distance.

There are badger groups you can join and organised badger watching evenings you can go on - check out the links.

Useful Contacts

The Badger Trust, All you need to know about Badgers, PO Box 78, East Grinstead, RH19 2WN. 08458 287878 - www.badgertrust.org.uk

The Mammal Society, 3, The Carronades, New Road, Southampton SO14 0AA. 02380 237874, enquiries@mammal.org.uk, www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/

Steve Jackson - Ultimate Badger Links List

Equipment I Use For Photographing Badgers

Camera Nikon f4s,
Nikon lenses 28 - 70 and 200mm Macro.
Flashguns: Metz 45 CL3, two SB26.
Quantum battery pack, Torch, Tripod.
Two [C22 Ultrapod II](#) brackets for flashguns in tree
[C38 tripod leg sleeves](#)
[C12 full length mat](#)
[C15 ground sheet shelter](#) (strung up in tree when raining).

Badgers and their setts are protected by law. If you see anybody acting suspicious near a sett contact the Police or RSPCA. Badger digging is still common in some parts of the country.



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