

Badger

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SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Taxidea taxus*. Genus stems from the New Latin “tax” meaning badger and Greek “idea” meaning a form or appearance. Specific epithet stems from the New Latin “taxus” meaning badger. Thus the species *Taxidea taxus* means the badger-like badger.

DESCRIPTION: The badger is a large, robust, short-legged, squat member of the weasel family. It has a short tail, long, shaggy, grizzled fur, and a distinct white stripe from the tip of the nose to the shoulder area. The face is marked with two white patches that parallel the middle stripe, and a black crescent-shaped mark on the cheeks. The eyes and ears are small, and the front feet have long claws. Badgers can emit an unsavory musk scent if provoked.

HABITAT: In Arizona, badgers are found throughout the state and occupy a variety of habitats. They occur primarily in grasslands, parklands, farmlands, and other treeless areas, but they can be found in forest glades and meadows, marshes, brushy areas, in desert scrub, and semidesert grasslands.

DISTRIBUTION: The type locality in Arizona, as described by Viola S. Schantz in 1948, is from the San Pedro River, Cochise County, on the Arizona-Sonora Mexico boundary. The badger ranges in the western United States east into the Great Plains, north into southern Canada, and south into most of Mexico.

BIOLOGY: Badgers feed on a diet of small mammals, namely ground squirrels, as well as birds, reptiles, eggs, insects, and occasionally carrion. The majority of prey is obtained by digging, for the long front claws and powerful legs enable this gangly mammal to



burrow at amazing speeds. They are known to dig faster than any mammal, including a man with a shovel. Badgers are primarily nocturnal, but are occasionally observed during the day.

Mating occurs in the late summer, but delayed implantation of embryos and arrested development prevent birth until the following year in the spring. Gestation is normally only six weeks, although the female is actually pregnant for around seven months. Litters typically contain from one to five pups, and females are able to mate as early as 4 months old. Males are able to mate in the autumn of their second year. Pups are born blind and helpless, but mature quickly and are on their own in the summer or early fall. Except during the breeding season, badgers are solitary animals.

Badgers do not hibernate, but are active year-round when temperatures rise above freezing. “Mine craters” are noticeable on fresh snow to indicate badger activity as they use their powerful claws to dig up hibernating prey. Some badgers have been observed to form loose associations with coyotes. As a badger forages, coyotes sometimes follow along and capture escaping rodents that are flushed from burrows. Coyotes in turn may keep prey from emerging from burrow exits, and may also help find new burrow areas. Badgers often tolerate coyotes in close

proximity and even engage in play behaviors with them.

A badger’s walk can be considered comical, since its short legs and broad body allow only for waddling, but a cornered, snarling, teeth-bared badger is not at all comical, and they can move surprisingly fast. They are ferocious fighters and should not be harassed.

STATUS: The badger is common throughout its range in Arizona, although it may not always be observed. It is not listed in the Department’s list of *Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona*. Through Commission Order 13, the Department allows unlimited take of badgers.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: None in Arizona. However, there is a growing Western concern that numbers may be dropping. Badgers are considered pests in some areas, and their burrows and excavated holes are considered hazardous for livestock and machinery. On the other hand, badgers also help control rodent populations, and their holes are used by other wildlife, such as burrowing owls. Their fur is used to make shaving and art brushes. ♣

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Wildlife biologist Melissa Swain has always had an interest in badgers and has seen several in the wild. Their squat waddle reminds her of a vacuum cleaner.