

Wildlife on Mount Baldo

Badger

Order *Carnivora*
 Family *Mustelidae*
 Genus *Meles*
 Species *Meles Meles* L.

Badgers are carnivorous mammals of the weasel family (*Mustelidae*). Their head is white, with two black bands stretching lengthwise from below the eyes up to the ears. The tail is white too but, unlike other weasels, it is short and wide. Feet are large, with strong claws used for digging in search of food, or as a means of defense. Human activity has greatly reduced their population, but numbers have increased in the Alps over the last few years. Badgers are becoming more common also on Mount Baldo.

Badgers are territorial, nocturnal animals with solitary habits. They inhabit forests but also open spaces with minimum vegetation, as long as they can find adequate shelters. They dig deep burrows with a complex network of tunnels and chambers. Numerous trails branch out of these burrows in various directions and are well beaten by the frequent passage of these animals, which tend to use fixed routes as they move from place to place. It is interesting to notice how sometimes part of the burrow that is being occupied by badgers is also used by foxes. Not far from the den are small holes in the ground (latrines) where badgers lay their droppings.

Badgers are omnivorous. They feed on small animals and on the eggs and young of ground-nesting birds, on roots, fruit, berries and seeds. Badgers have a social life only when they reproduce, but parental care of newborns is carried out just by females that stay with their young until the following summer. At the end of summer, badgers retreat to their burrows, but this is not considered a true hibernation since they wake up during winter to eat and drink. If the temperature drops significantly or if weather conditions are harsh, these animals can spend many weeks in their dens, surviving on the fat they accumulated during the nice season.

