

## Celebrating Ohio Wildlife: American Badger

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It's time once again to make a trek to the great outdoors and learn about some great Ohio wildlife. Have you been following our journey about the animals that call Ohio home? We have covered a vast array of native Ohio animals such as the big brown bat, river otter, smoky shrew, prairie vole, hummingbirds, and turkeys, just to name a few recent features, but we are certainly not done! For this week, our feature animal is the American badger. Let's learn about their habitat, identifying characteristics, behaviors, and so much more!

The American badger is listed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) as a "Species of Concern", which is an informal term indicating a species which may have a range or habitat that may be restricted or have low populations. This animal is a close relative of a commonly seen animal, the striped skunk. One thing that is notably similar between both animals is the white stripe that extends from their nose back to their head. Around their eyes and cheeks, they have patches of white fur or "badges" to which they receive their name with the remaining parts of their body appearing as a mixture of silvery gray, black, and buff colors and black feet, according to ODNR. The badger is further identified by its flat, stocky body, short legs, webbed toes, small ears, and long claws.

Male badgers will reach sizes up to 16-24 pounds with females coming in on the lighter side at around 14 pounds. The average lifespan of this species is typically in the range of 4-5 years while they do have the ability to live up to 14 years, according to ODNR. Throughout the United States, the American badger can be found in a wide variety of areas covering much of the country west of the Mississippi River. They can also be found in the midwestern states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. According to NatureWorks, this species prefers areas that offer tall grass prairies and farmland, although they also like to make a home around forest edges. The nest entrance for the badger will resemble that of a large groundhog hole with a large amount of displaced soil beside the hole.

The den or burrow for the badger is a crucial component of their life as they use it for sleeping, hunting, food storage, and giving birth to their young. NatureWorks writes that they will not always stay in the same burrow from day to day, with the exception being when they are giving birth to their young.

Mating season for the American badger typically takes place in the summer and early autumn months. ODNR writes that members of this species are polygamous breeders and although mating takes place in the summer, fertilization does not take place until December through February. Once fertilization takes place, the gestation period for the badger is about six weeks with the young being born in nests that are typically underground and lined with grass around March. The typical litter will range between 1-5 young. According to NatureWorks, the young badgers are born without sight, which comes at about 4 weeks old, and with a thin fur coat. Once the badger

reaches an age of 8-12 weeks, they will be weaned from the mother yet will stay with her until the 7 to 9-month stage of their life.

It is the superior sense of smell and hearing that helps the American badger locate prey for their meal, according to ODNR. They prefer burrowing animals such as rats, gophers, mice, and the ground squirrel for most of their diet. NatureWorks writes that they utilize their strong, sharp claws to dig their prey from the ground and sometimes digging into the home of another animal eagerly awaiting their return. Coyotes nearby watch the fearful prey of the badger flee from their den and seize upon the opportunity to get themselves a meal. ODNR writes that badgers have nictitating eyelids, which are transparent covers over their eyes that shield their eyes from the soil displaced as they are digging. Other animals such as snakes, birds, and other reptiles also can be part of the badger's diet.

In defense, the badger has developed many things to protect itself from predators. The muscular neck and thick, loose fur allows them the opportunity to look behind them to bite and claw at their predator, according to NatureWorks. Not only do they do that, but they will let out loud sounds that sound like a hiss, growl, or snarl.

Now you have a good understanding about another great Ohio animal, but there are so many more to go! Have you seen the American badger out and about in your neighborhood? If so, send us your pictures and we would love to share! Stay tuned for further installments of our Ohio Wildlife series to learn about more animals that call our great state home!