

Badger gates in rabbit-proof fencing

Where rabbit-proof fencing cuts across badger runs, particularly near active setts, the badgers are likely to dig under or make holes in the netting, thus allowing rabbits to cross the fence. Careful positioning of badger gates where the netting crosses badger runs can help prevent damage to the fence, whilst still allowing badgers to carry on using these routes.

Erecting the fence

Prior to erecting the rabbit-proof netting, the proposed fence-line should be surveyed for badger runs or paths. Runs are usually most obvious during spring, when badger activity is high and vegetation has not yet grown up to its full height. Well-used paths will often be distinct and relatively clear of vegetation due to repeated trampling by the badgers.

As the fence is erected, a gap approximately 200mm (8") wide by 300mm (12") high should be cut in the netting where it crosses badger runs.

Leave the gaps open for a period until it appears that the badgers are regularly using them. If damage occurs elsewhere along the fence, consider cutting extra holes at these locations.

Once the badgers appear to have become used to the fence, construct the frame and a gate, using Figure 1 as a guide. Fit the gate frame and floor block into the fence, stapling the netting to the wooden frame. Again, allow a period for the badgers to use the open gates and then fit in the wooden flaps, ensuring that each flap opens and closes freely both ways. Alternatively, the flap can be fitted with the rest of the gate and held open with wire until the badgers start using the gate

regularly.

Maintenance

The gates should be checked regularly to ensure that they have not become blocked or fallen into disrepair.

Other wildlife

The Forestry Commission has observed foxes and pheasants using the gates. However, so long as the flap is of sufficient weight, rabbits are unable to push this open and so are effectively excluded.

Materials required

- 1.5m (5') of 40mm (1½") x 40mm (1½") timber, for the gate frame;
- 250mm (10") x 200mm (8") x 40mm (1½") timber, for the gate flap;
- suitable nails.

the wood used in the gates should be treated with a non-toxic, low odour, preservative product.

Further information

In England, further advice on badgers and on problems caused by other mammals and birds can be obtained by contacting the Department for Environment, Food

and Rural Affairs (Defra) Wildlife Management Team at:

Address: Wildlife Administration Unit, Defra, Burghill Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, BS10 6NJ

Telephone: 0845 601 4523 (local rate)

E-mail: enquiries.southwest@defra.gsi.gov.uk

A range of leaflets on wildlife topics is available online at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates>

Acknowledgements

The use of badger gates in rabbit-proof fencing was first described by R J King in 1964 in the Quarterly Journal of Forestry.

The Forestry Commission Leaflet 68 also describes the use of badger gates in forestry situations.

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Figure 1 Two-way badger gate construction

