

State's First Badger Ecology Study Begins in Southwest WI

MADISON, WIS.—This summer, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Bureau of Science Services teamed with professor Tim Van Deelen of UW-Madison Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology to start the first-ever study of American badger ecology in the badger state. This study is a companion to a WDNR-UW Milwaukee statewide investigation into Badger genetics. The ecology study will focus on southwestern Wisconsin, specifically parts of southern Iowa, southwestern Dane, northwestern Green, and northern Lafayette counties in the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area. This area includes the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area.

2011 was the pilot season of what will be a 3-year study looking into the habitat use, movements, home range, diet, population structure, and reproduction of badgers. Current results show that badgers appear to prefer sites with sandy or light soils for their burrows and den sites, even if quite rocky (one rock excavated by a badger weighed 19 pounds). They also seem to prefer burrowing into slopes.

Researchers have been placing traps at burrow openings and have successfully caught 2 male badgers so far. Both were trapped in Iowa County, on land owned by a non-profit organization called The Prairie Enthusiasts. Researchers developed a technique to surgically implant radio transmitters in the backs of badgers to track their movements throughout the year. Currently researchers have a transmitter in one adult male badger and have been tracking his movements several times a week. He has moved about 5.5 miles from the location where he was trapped, and is now residing south of Ridgeway. We are actively attempting to put radio transmitters in more badgers.

Jimmy Doyle is the lead WDNR field researcher on the project. **If you know of any active badger burrows on your land, and you are in the portions of the counties mentioned above, please contact Jimmy Doyle or David Sample (WDNR) at 608-221-6351.**