

The Mighty Badger

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Have you ever wondered what causes those oval-shaped holes along and under Dallas County's paved trails? Every year, usually in the spring and early summer months, the phone rings off the hook with reports of holes appearing by the trail or mounds of soil and rock flung all over it. More than likely what you are seeing is the result of the American badger. It's true that there are other burrowing species found in Dallas County, but nine out of ten times that I have to fill a hole, it's because of the wholesome badger.

The American badger is roughly 30 inches long and can weigh up to 19 pounds. With an oval-shaped body, characteristic black and white striping on its face and two-inch long claws, the badger is a unique native resident of Dallas County. Seldom are they seen, the nocturnal badger may create many burrow holes in a single day. The ir choice of prey is usually ground squirrels, mice and snakes.

So why does the badger make these holes? Well, it needs shelter for sleeping, hiding, weather protection and a home to raise its offspring. About half the time, holes along the trail are failed attempts at creating a den because of the underlying railroad ties and compacted rock. The usual result is a badger making many holes until eventually finding success just a few feet off the trail. Usually the entrance hole is one to two feet wide with dirt and rock kicked out in front of the burrow entrance. The den itself will usually range from three to four feet deep, although I've seen some close to ten feet deep! A badger may create multiple burrows with interconnecting tunnels. Displaced soil and rock can be flung many feet from the burrow.

During the spring, female badgers live in dens to give birth and raise their offspring. These dens are usually occupied for extended periods of time. In the warm months, both female and male badgers will dig out existing prey holes and, depending on the availability of nearby prey, may only use it for one day before moving on. The prevalence of all these holes adjacent to the bike trail can create a safety hazard for trail users. Whenever one is found along the trail or within the mowed area of the trail, it is immediately filled. But due to the nature of the badger, it's very likely the hole will be dug back out that very night. This struggle with the badger will continue for a few days until they decide it's not worth it and move on elsewhere. Though the badger causes a lot of headaches for DCCB staff, I have come to respect their unique and unwavering abilities.



*The American badger
(photo from Iowa DNR)*