

Notes

AN OBSERVATION OF BADGER PREDATION ON RICHARDSON GROUND SQUIRRELS.—On 2 June 1973, I observed an adult badger (*Taxidea taxus*) ambush and kill three Richardson ground squirrels (*Spermophilus richardsonii*). The observation was made approximately 9 kilometers south of Medina in Stutsman County, North Dakota.

Bailey (N. Am. Fauna 49, U.S.D.A. Bur. Biol. Survey, 1926) states that the Richardson ground squirrels are the principal prey of badgers in North Dakota. Snead and Hendrickson (J. Mammal. 23:380-391, 1942) found that ground squirrels (*Citellus* sp.) accounted for 67 percent of the major food items in 239 badger scats collected in Iowa.

In reviewing the literature, I found no citations of direct observations of badger predation, although several hunting techniques are described. These are: (1) digging into the burrows of active and hibernating animals (Seton, Lives of Game Animals, 2:292, 1926; Snead and Hendrickson, op. cit.; Sargeant and Warner, J. Mammal. 53:207-210, 1972); and (2) waiting in the burrows of ground squirrels in "ambush" (Balph, J. Mammal. 42:423-424, 1961). The predation I observed involved ambush-type, surface captures.

At about 1730 while radio-tracking ducks, I noticed a badger approximately 110 meters away running toward me in a heavily grazed pasture that contained a large community of Richardson ground squirrels. I observed the animal using a 20X spotting scope. The badger was up-wind and moving toward me on a line diagonal with the direction of my travel. The badger, sensing my presence, stopped and reared back its head apparently sniffing the air, but after 15-20 seconds resumed running in the same direction as before. The badger ran with its body fully erect and tail upright in a flag-like position.

Shortly thereafter the badger came downwind of a ground squirrel standing erect at a burrow entrance. Immediately, and without stopping, the badger turned and began approaching the ground squirrel. The squirrel fled into its burrow. The distance from the burrow to the point at which the badger scented the ground squirrel was approximately 20 meters. Upon reaching the burrow, the badger peered into the entrance momentarily, dug rapidly for 2-3 seconds, then ran to a second entrance and peered in. It ran back and forth between the two entrances for about 30 seconds and then crouched approximately 1 meter behind the first entrance. It remained in this position for approximately 20 seconds, then suddenly leaped at the entrance of the burrow and began running back and forth between the two entrances. Once again this culminated with the badger crouching behind and leaping at the first entrance. The behavior was repeated again but this time the badger crouched behind the second burrow entrance and, after leaping, retreated with a ground squirrel. He consumed it, repeatedly sniffing the air as he ate.

After the badger had eaten the squirrel (approximately 10 minutes) it began running in the same direction as when I first observed it. As it approached an area having a high density of ground squirrels, two young and one adult ground

squirrel ran to a mound beside a burrow entrance. The badger halted and moved into a large clump of wolf-berry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*) about 17 meters from the mound. There it stopped and sat crouched facing the ground squirrels. The latter remained alert and near the mound for about 25 minutes, at which time the two smaller ground squirrels moved about 9 and 10 meters respectively from the mound. At this moment, the badger ran from the wolf-berry, grabbed the ground squirrel farthest from the mound and without stopping, dropped it and ran about 7 meters farther to capture the second ground squirrel. The badger then carried them into a clump of wolf-berry and visual contact was lost.

The wolf-berry clump was later thoroughly searched but no ground squirrel remains were found. Similarly, no remains were found at the site of the first kill.

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