

Nature Note

The Badger

► YOU HAD better not badger the badger. He may seem shy, slow and awkward, but this broad-shouldered waddling cousin of the skunk can be instantly roused into a thick, furred bundle of fury. With his two-inch razor-like claws, he is a formidable enemy, and most creatures have learned to leave him alone.

Low-slung and pigeon-toed, this tough, wedge-shaped creature weighs about 14 pounds, although large individuals may weigh as much as 23 pounds. His "badge," by which he is readily recognized, is a pattern of two black lines that stretch from the nose over both sides of his white head. The fur of his body is coarse, silvery gray and grizzled with black. Badger bristles were once prized for fine shaving brushes. At one time, badgers were raised on farms, much as mink and fox, but their voracious appetites made it unprofitable.

The badger, *Meles*, is an excellent digger. By using all powerful feet at once a badger can dig in a flurry of soil and disappear underground in an incredibly short time. Preferring to live in dry plains, deserts and forests where the soil is loose, the badger makes his home in a cozy den several feet underground lined with dry leaves or grass.

Much misunderstood by many people, the badger has often been ruthlessly shot. In reality he is an excellent predator of rodents, lizards, snakes, frogs, insects and other undesirable animals.

The American badger can be found from Canada to Mexico and from the Pacific Coast to the Mississippi River. The range of the Eurasian badgers reaches from England and Spain across Europe and northern Asia to Japan, as far south as the Himalayas.

• Science News Letter, 86:379 December 12, 1964

AGRICULTURE

Atomic Radiation Kills Grain Pests

► ATOMIC RADIATION can destroy pesty insects in stored food by exposing them to radioactive cobalt.

This application of atomic energy promises to reduce millions of dollars worth of damage caused each year in the United States by insects infesting stored food products. Agricultural scientists are using radioactive cobalt, which is also used in experimental cancer treatment.

Many insects such as beetles, moths and mites died when they and the grain were moved on a conveyor belt past a source of radiation, a U.S. Department of Agriculture team, Robert G. Cogburn, Elvin W. Tilton and Wendell E. Burkholder, reported to the annual meeting of the Entomological Society of America in Philadelphia.

When some of these pests did survive, their ability to reproduce was sharply reduced. Many of the insects reaching maturity were found to be completely sterile.

Most of the irradiated insects that did reach maturity could not fly or were unable to coordinate their movements.

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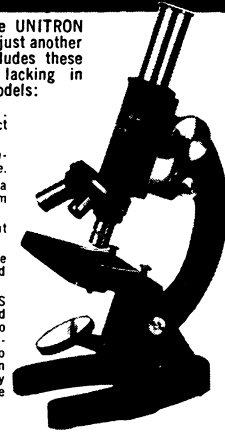
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