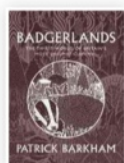
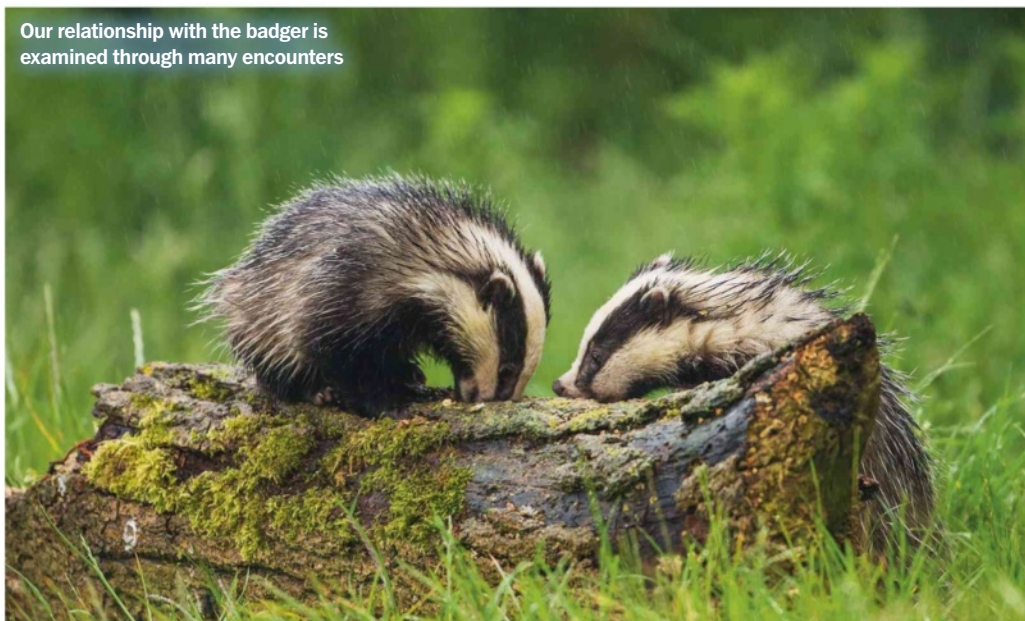


Our relationship with the badger is examined through many encounters



book

BADGERLANDS

Patrick Barkham

Granta

£18.99

ISBN: 9781847085047

Badgers are much in the news at the moment, with the continuing controversy over Bovine TB and trial culls of badger populations, so this is a timely release by *Guardian* writer Patrick Barkham, perhaps best known for his

travelogue *Butterfly Isles*. It's an enlightening and satisfying dip into the twilight world inhabited by badgers, those who watch them, those who study them and those who abuse them. The issue of bovine TB is covered carefully and with creditable balance, however; it is only one strand in this multifaceted book,

Badgerlands is a pleasing read, and sometimes the prose makes you want to sing it. It is written in the modish style of the New Nature Writing, where you learn about nature through the author's personal encounters. Thankfully, Barkham manages to avoid the trap of making himself more important than the subject, and his description of place is

sometimes inspired. Obviously some encounters are more interesting than others and, in that regard, I think that some could have been pruned without any loss to the narrative. Brian May, national treasure, actually sounded quite dull.

I think Barkham might overstate the importance of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* in changing our perception of badgers, but the account of the much-loved author's life story will give you a jolt. That's fine – part of the point of such books is to provide plenty of food for thought, and this one does so in fine style.

Dominic Couzens is a birder and nature writer.



book

THE NATURE TRACKER'S HANDBOOK

Nick Baker

Bloomsbury Natural History

£14.99

ISBN: 9781408151501

Thousands of years ago, tracking was a matter of survival for hunters who searched for signs of animals in our wild landscapes. Today, it's fun and adds a bit of spice to your next country walk.

This excellent book is perfect for getting more out of your walks. It's divided into chapters that cover the different signs of life you'll see – such as tracks and trails, gnawed bark, dead animals, and holes and burrows, plus a few pages on the kit you'll need to become a master tracker. The section on droppings is excellent, if best not read while you're having lunch.

Slightly strangely for a British-written RSPB publication, the book includes a few animals you won't find here. Indeed, if you do find high tree markings made by the claws of a brown bear, it may be best to head straight home.

David Perrett is the production editor of *Countryfile* magazine.

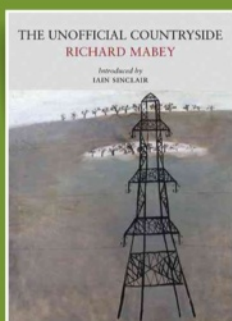
Countryside classic

The Unofficial Countryside

Richard Mabey

Little Toller Books, 1973

ISBN: 9780956254559



Few of us were raised in the authentic countryside, so we had to make do with the 'unofficial' marooned between the streets and roads – wasteland, parks, churchyards, reservoirs, canals – even gravel pits and sewage works. Back in 1972, Mabey visited these very places and reported back their defiant beauty.

The fruit of his journey was this book, first published in 1973, but available again in paperback.

As a former senior editor at Penguin Books, Mabey writes concisely, and within a few pages he becomes both your pal and a well-informed guide.

He tells us that a single stem of a rosebay willowherb will release 80,000 seeds and that buddleia was introduced to Britain from China in 1896. And then his sharp eye spots a guelder rose growing near a water course at the sewage works while, across the way, hart's-tongue fern clings to a crumbling wall.

Only when he strays into civilisation does his exquisite writing show the odd hint of dating. As he draws his binoculars to his eyes he ponders: "Would the constable ever believe that I was looking at a house martin's nest under construction and not into the typists' powder room?"

The many who know of Mabey and his deep love of nature through his radio and TV appearances and his writing in different media will happily speak up on his behalf.

Chosen by BBC radio producer **Mark Hodkinson**