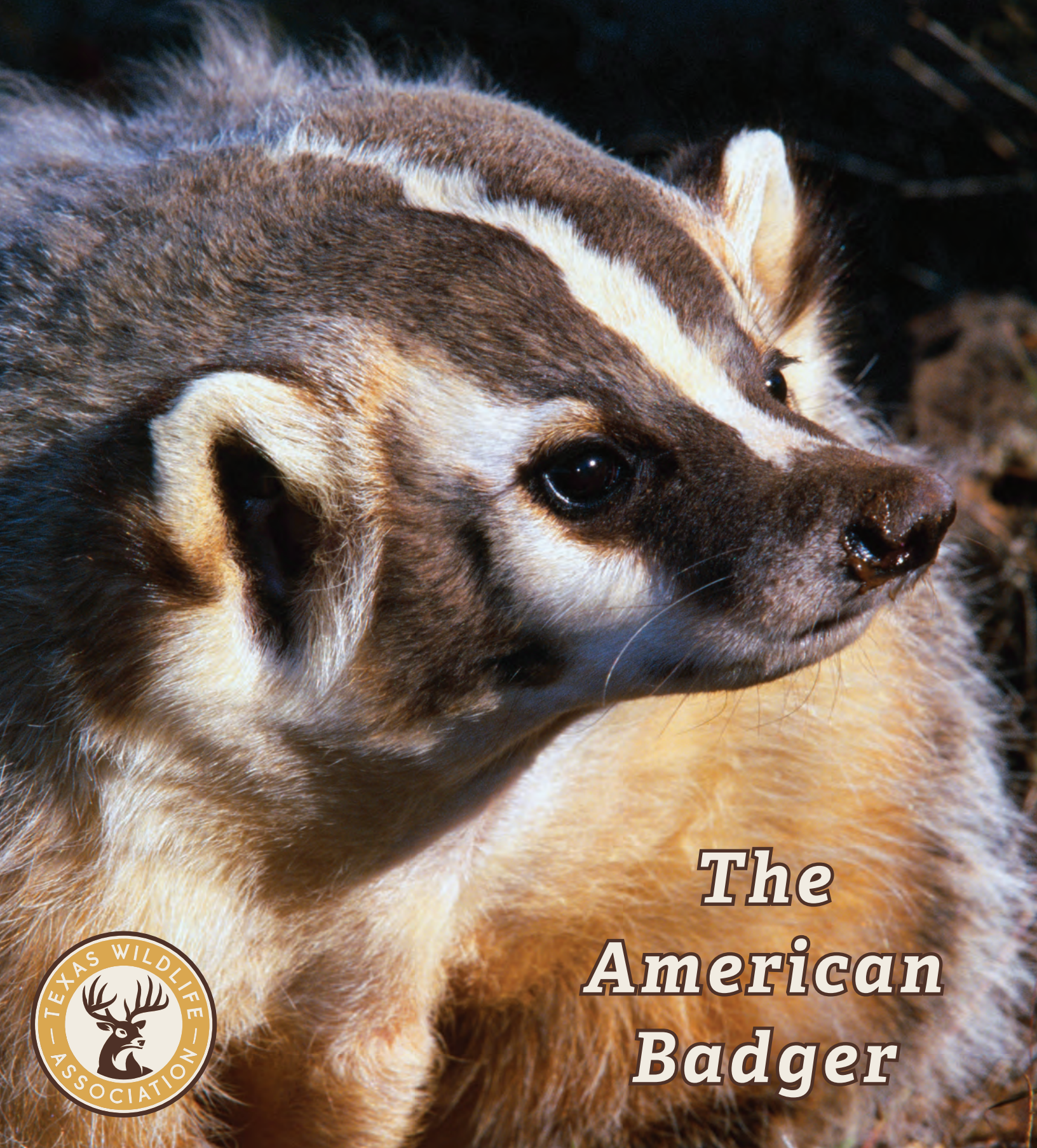




CRITTER CONNECTIONS



The American Badger





Salvias



Salvia is a genus of plants in the mint family. They are commonly known as sages, but they are not related to last issue's plant, the Texas Sage. There are hundreds of species of salvia, and over 20 are native to Texas. You can recognize a plant from this genus by its square stem, tube-shaped 2-lipped flowers and minty smell.

Salvia flowers typically grow from a stalk called a raceme (raceme). The colors vary depending on the species, with white, pink, red and purple flowers. Each flower is split into two parts that look like a pair of lips and form a tube shape that provides nectar for pollinators. The bottom petals are larger and can be used as a landing platform for smaller species of insects.

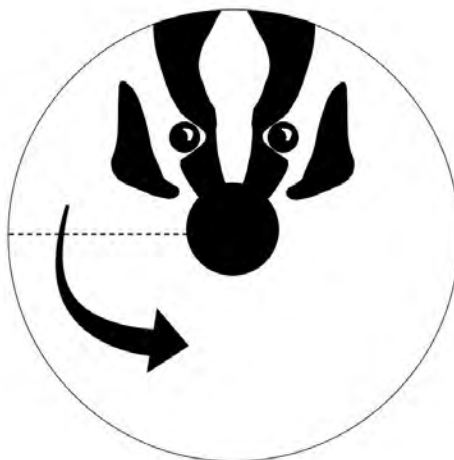
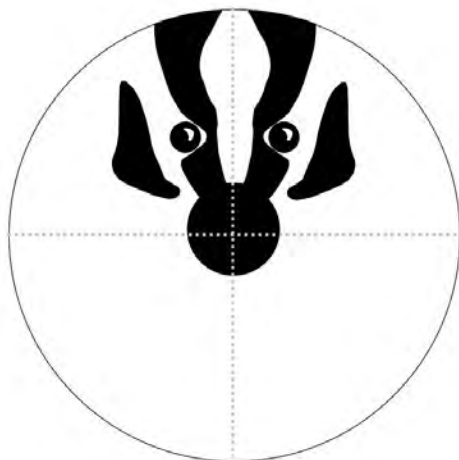


Salvia are pretty easy to recognize once you know what to look for, but one way to be sure is by the smell. If you rub a leaf between your fingers you will smell a very fresh and citrus-minty odor. Not all, but many salvia species have edible flowers, and the leaves can be dried for teas. They grow very well in Texas and are a great addition to your garden if you want to attract pollinators like bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

Article source from Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center. Photos by Elanor Dean.

Badger Craft

1. Cut a piece of paper into a circle and fold into quarters, then unfold
2. Draw the black parts of a badger face onto the top half of the paper
3. Cut the paper along the left fold from the edge, to the center
4. Make a cone by pulling the top side of the cut around the circle
5. Tape or glue the cone together
6. Admire your artwork



Did you know...



- ... that dachshunds (wiener dogs) were bred to hunt badgers, and the name means badger dog in German?
- ... that pregnant badgers are able to delay their baby's development so it's born in the spring?
- ... that badgers are carnivores and will hunt their prey by digging into burrows?
- ... that badgers do not hibernate, but they become less active in the winter?
- ... that badgers are fossorial which means they are adapted for burrowing?
- ... that badgers are solitary animals which means they usually live alone?
- ... that badgers are in the same family as weasels, otters and ferrets?
- ... that badgers can produce a stinky odor to drive away predators?
- ... that badgers are very fierce and have few natural predators?
- ... that badgers are usually found in grassland habitats?

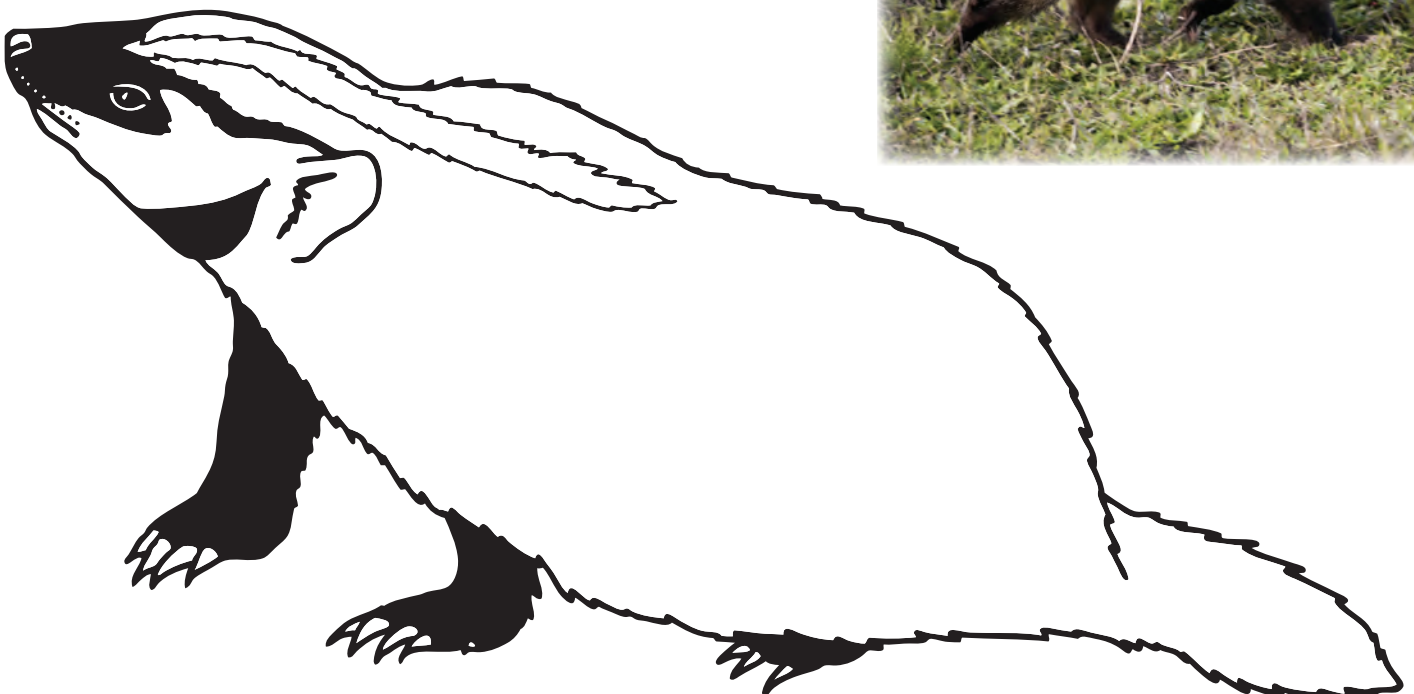


Photo source: US Fish and Wildlife Service

Color Me

American Badger

(*Taxidea taxus*)





by Elanor Dean

The American Badger is the only species of badger in Texas and North America. They are distant cousins to hog badgers, ferret badgers, stink badgers and the more well-known European and honey badgers. They are characterized by their flat and wide body (2-3 feet long) covered with grayish brown hair, short legs and pointed head with small ears and black and white face stripes. They have very long front claws and sharp teeth.

Badgers are found in grassland habitats like prairies, plains and pastures. They live across most of Texas, except the far eastern part of the state. This open habitat is well suited for their most notable behavior, digging. Badgers are **fossorial**, which means they are adapted to burrow. Burrowing is an important adaptation both to hunt for their prey and to seek shelter.



Let's talk about their adaptations which allow them to be such excellent burrowers. First, they have very long and sharp front claws to dig into the ground. Their legs are short, but

powerful which helps them tunnel quickly through soil. Even their triangle-shaped face is adapted for digging. They also have a special membrane on their eyes to protect them from dirt while digging. They dig burrows to serve as a shelter for protection, sleeping and raising young. They also dig to find their prey.

Badgers are carnivores which means their diet is mostly meat. They mainly eat small burrowing mammals like ground squirrels, prairie dogs, rats and mice, but they have also been known to eat insects, reptiles and carrion. **Carrion** is meat from an animal that is already dead and is the main diet of scavengers. Badgers will store meat in their burrows to consume later. They will hunt for their prey by digging underground to chase burrowing rodents, and they will hunt hibernating animals. Badgers will also wait underground for prey to return to their dens.



Badgers are **solitary** animals which means they live alone and not in family groups, but sometimes coyotes will hunt with badgers. When a coyote is chasing its prey on land, the prey may escape into a hole. Badgers will dig underground while hunting for prey which sometimes causes the prey to crawl out of their burrow to escape. Unfortunately for the badger and the prey, the coyote is ready on the surface to catch the rodent and steal a meal from the badger.

They are fierce animals when cornered and do not have very many natural predators. If a predator gets too close they will hiss and growl and even bite. Badgers





also have glands which produce a strong stinky odor to deter predators. This stinky smell is also used to mark their territory and to find a mate. They also have thick hair and muscular necks which make them difficult for a predator to attack. Their thick fur is even a helpful defense against rattlesnake bites.

In the winter, badgers will not hibernate, but they may go into a period of inactivity called **torpor** when it is very cold. During torpor they will rest in their burrow in a deeper and longer sleep than usual. Periods of torpor usually only last a day or two compared to hibernation which is for a full season. Since torpor is for short periods of time, badgers do not have to stock up on fat reserves like true hibernating animals.



Badgers are born in the spring in litters of 1-5 cubs. Female badgers will gather grass to line their den in preparation for having babies. They are also able to delay the development of their growing baby before giving birth. This is important to ensure they are born in the spring when the weather is warmer and food is more available. Badger cubs are born



blind and helpless and rely on their mother for protection. They will drink milk until they are 2-3 months old, but they may emerge from the burrow with their mother after 5-6 weeks. They will learn to hunt while still nursing and will leave the den after 5-6 months. They live 9-10 years in the wild.

Badgers are very interesting animals and are great at controlling rodent populations. They are mainly nocturnal and spend time underground, so you are lucky if you ever get a chance to see one in the wild. They need several acres of land to provide space for their survival, so it is important to protect the grassland habitats where they live.



WORD BANK

- fossorial** – adapted for burrowing
- carrion** – the remains of a dead animal
- solitary** – living alone
- torpor** – a sleep-like period of time where bodily functions slow down to survive cold weather

Sources: Texas Parks and Wildlife
 Photos from Wikimedia Commons: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, USFWS, Bureau of Land Management, Yellowstone National Park

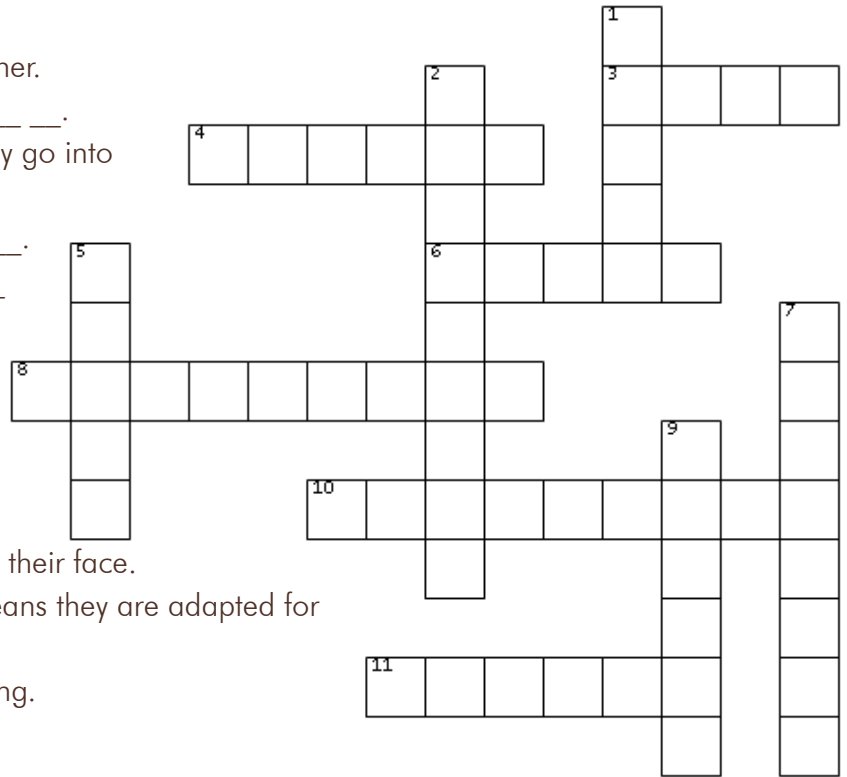
Badger Crossword

ACROSS

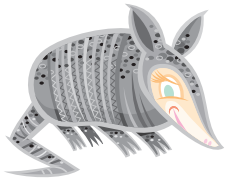
3. Sometime badgers and coyotes _____ together.
4. Badgers will sleep underground in a _____.
6. In the winter badgers don't hibernate, but they may go into a deep _____ called torpor.
8. A meat eater is called a _____.
10. Badgers are found in _____ habitats.
11. Badgers do not have many predators because they are _____.

DOWN

1. Badgers have black and _____ stripes on their face.
2. Badgers are _____ which means they are adapted for burrowing.
5. Long and sharp _____ are used for digging.
7. A _____ hunts other animals.
9. This issue is all about the American _____.



Created by Puzzlemaker at DiscoveryEducation.com



Nancy's Corner



"Badgers are great at digging, just like me!"

Draw an example of a badger's prey:



List a fun fact you learned about badgers:

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