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SAMPLE PAGES

BELGIUM

One of the smallest and most crowded countries of the European continent, Belgium has different – and contrasting – sides. While most of the northern part of the country is heavily populated, developed, industrialized and urbanized, the southern third of Belgium is more sparsely populated and, in some areas, still holds substantial forest cover. Around 50% of Luxemburg Province, the southernmost province of Belgium, are covered with forests where wildlife is abundant (with Red Deer, Roe Deer and Wild Boar as large mammals, and numerous smaller animals such as the Badger, Beaver, Red Fox, Wild Cat...).

There is only one single wildlife photography hide currently operational in Belgium, devoted to the photography of Badgers, and the situation is not likely to evolve dramatically in the near future...

Belgium

Bureau des Guides

BADGER

Category: photography hide

> The Operator

'Bureau des Guides' (The Guide Office) is a not-for-profit association of professional nature guides. Guides from the association lead numerous excursions in the southern part of Belgium and adjacent areas, focusing on the discovery of nature and the observation of wildlife. The association also offers consulting services related to wildlife management and/or nature tourism, and is involved in nature-related publications.

Bureau des Guides has developed and manages a photographic hide for badger watching in the eastern part of the country. It is currently the only operation of this type specifically designed and meant for the photography of the very shy and elusive animal that is available on the continent (other badger watching operations exist on the British Isles).

> The Area

The hide is located in the Haute Ardenne (the 'Bulge') area of Eastern Belgium, in Luxemburg Province. The area is characterized by its extended forest cover, and by a succession of hills and deep valleys; it is known for its rather rough climate. The landscape is predominantly made of a patchwork of coniferous and/or mixed forests and verdant cattle pastures. Human density is comparatively low. The area is rich in wildlife such as the Red Deer, Roe Deer, Wild Boar, Red Fox, Badger, Beaver, Wild Cat, raptors...

> The Activity

This is an evening activity only. Badgers will typically appear in front of the hide at dusk. The time spent by the animals on the observation area depends on several factors (it usually lasts between 1 and 1 1/2 hours). Photographers need to be ready in the hide at least one hour before the expected time of arrival of badgers on the observation area. Meeting with the guide will usually be at 6.00 or 7.00 p.m.

Three to five individual animals are usually observed under very good conditions every evening. The observation area in front of the photographic hide can be floodlit whether necessary (spring and autumn).

A guide from the association is always present in the hide, in order to brief photographers and help them get the best opportunities for shooting images of badgers.

> The Hide

The hide is a wooden cabin (5 x 2 m) located on the edge of a forested escarpment overlooking a deep valley with a small stream, in very quiet surroundings. It is located at a distance of some 25 m of the badger sett, in order to allow the animals to enjoy full privacy and intimacy "at home". From the place where vehicles need to be left, the hide is reached after a 15-minute walk along the valley and a (steep) ascent up the slope.

The hide is equipped with wooden banks and chairs. On the front wall are four large windows allowing for good observation of badgers at close quarters.

It is a "convertible" hide, that can be used either for watching badgers or photographing badgers. During usual badger watching sessions, it can take up to twelve people sitting on the banks and watching the animals through glass windows. The number of participants is restricted to a maximum of four when the hide is rented by photographers. In its "photographic" version, the hide offers the opportunity to photograph badgers at ground level, for more natural images, and glass frames can be removed from the windows.

Badgers usually come close enough near the hide (between 10 and 3 m): a combination of 200 to 400 mm telephoto lenses is adequate. Photographers do not need to bring a tripod, as tripod heads, rice bags and a shelf are available. Badgers are usually not bothered by flashlights, but can sometimes react to the noise of still cameras

The hide is operational from the first weekend in April till the last weekend in October).

> Additional Species

While waiting for badgers to appear, photographers in the hide are often entertained by birds such as the Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Crested Tit, Eurasian Jay, and Red Squirrels... Once in a while, other animals will pass in front of the hide: Roe Deer, Red Fox, Beech Marten, Wild Cat...

> The Costs

Different rates are available depending on the number of photographers booked, the number of consecutive days booked, the season and the day (mid-week and week-end rates apply). The rates include the use of the photography hide and the assistance of an experienced guide during the photographic session.

Please check on the operator's website for more updated details with regard to the costs.

> Lodging and Boarding in the Area

There are numerous lodging and boarding opportunities in the near area, adapted to all budgets, like hotels, B&B's, cottages, holiday houses, camping sites...

Contact Details

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