**BB\_MONARCH\_WildAmericaBelligerentasaBadger\_S11\_Ep4\_temp.mp3**

[00:01:07] **Speaker 1** I'm Marty Stouffer. One creature I find particularly amusing is the badger. Its irritable disposition is almost comical, but the badgers temper is no laughing matter and it's a dangerous opponent when provoked. However, when given the choice, it would rather dig to safety than stand and fight. The Badger is literally a digging machine, and can burrow up to a foot a minute. Its forefeet are equipped with long claws that are used less for protection than to break up and loosen the soil. Its sturdier hind legs then push the dirt out of the way. The badger lives to dig and digs to live. Come along as we take a look at one of our most notorious animals and see why it's earned the title, belligerent as a badger. The badger lives throughout our western states, from the Mississippi Basin to the Pacific Ocean. This adaptable creature can live in any environment where ground rodents are plentiful and the soil is light and sandy. On the prairie, the badger shares its habitat with a variety of other creatures. The elusive pronghorn is one of the oldest Native American animals. Though reasonably plentiful today, at the turn of the century, 40 million pronghorns roamed our plains and prairies. It's not only the fastest mammal in North America, but also one of most curious. True to form, it hears the badger's commotion and moves in for a closer look. The badger, sensing its presence, makes it perfectly clear that the pronghorn has overstepped its boundaries. With the nuisance gone, the temperamental tunneler returns to its digging. This large member of the weasel family does not dig simply for pleasure. On the contrary, its whole existence depends on its burrowing habits. It digs for defense, shelter, food, and sometimes just for fun. Badgers will often sleep for weeks on end when the weather is cold. This sleep is not a true hibernation because as soon as the skies clear and the temperatures climb it will emerge to satisfy its apparently insatiable appetite. Food is not as plentiful in the winter and the badger will often attack larger animals if its hunger is great enough. Ring-neck pheasants are as tasty as they are beautiful. But badgers rarely feast on pheasants because they're not quick enough to catch them. However, if it should stumble upon an injured bird or one that a more agile predator has caught, it will not hesitate to fight for such a tree. Perfectly designed for its burrowing and hunting lifestyle, the badger is almost as wide as it is long and has tremendous strength. Although its vision is poor, this digging doormat more than makes up for its bad eyesight with an acute sense of hearing and a keen sense of smell. The combination of smelling and hearing abilities make it an efficient hunter, especially of rodents. In fact, a badger can tell the sex, health, and location of another badger simply by its scent. In this case, the commotion and smell of fresh blood immediately catch the attention of a competitor foraging nearby. The badger has distinctive facial markings. The nose, eyes, and forehead are black with a narrow white stripe that runs from just behind the nose to the shoulders. Their unusually thick skin is covered with a grayish-brown fur. In the 1930s, this fur was used for shaving brushes and ladies' coat collars and would bring as much as $50 a pelt. Today, with the creation of synthetics, their hide is practically worthless. Except, of course, to the badger. The term badgering means to tease, bully, or bother someone. This verb probably originated from an English custom when so-called sportsmen staged fights between dogs and a badger. The unfortunate badger was put into a barrel, which was then laid on its side. Dachshunds, dogs of German origin, bred small specifically for chasing these fierce animals from their holes, would then try to get inside the barrel and force the badger out. Interestingly enough... This practice was outlawed because of inhumane treatment to the dogs, not the badgers. A badger either escapes or fights, but rarely will it surrender. It's no wonder these burly excavators have few natural enemies. The bobcat waits nearby as the badger attempts to stash its prize. Finally, the waiting pays off and the Bobcat moves in. However, when the badger realizes that its meal is in jeopardy, it quickly returns to reclaim its stolen catch. Bested once again, the cat watches hungrily as this prairie poacher devours its kill. The badger, as a member of the mustelid or weasel family, is also characterized by its musk glands. An angry or agitated individual will discharge a foul-smelling odor. Although it can't aim and spray like its cousin the skunk, the stench can saturate an area and deter even the most persistent adversary. Finally, the bobcat concedes. As the day passes, this badger continues its exploration before the weather turns cold again. On warm winter days, this tenacious creature will often excavate a large area with the hope of finding a den of hibernating ground squirrels. One of the most ferocious sites in nature is Badger Fighting Badger. This is only a minor squabble. A unique physical makeup corresponds perfectly to a fierce fighting spirit. Its skin is tough yet fits so loosely that if the animal is grabbed from behind it can literally turn around inside its own skin and bite the attacker. And a bite from a badger is nothing to be taken lightly. Its 34 teeth automatically sharpen each other when the mouth opens and closes. Attached to the skull. The jawbone is held in place by strong muscles that lock shut when grabbing prey or attacking an enemy. The only way to open the jaw of a badger unwilling to let go is to break it. As a matter of fact, they're so stubborn they won't release their grip until their victim is dead. On occasion, two are found dead with their jaws locked in a death grip. There's no question. A badger has definitely met its match. In fighting another badger. This one quickly forgets about its excavation, reclaims its prize, and heads off to its winter sleeping den, leaving its hungry competitor behind. Meadowlands and open country are preferred for their abundant supply of ground-dwelling rodents. Though more commonly found on our western plains and prairies, they also live in mountainous regions. By nature, badgers are solitary animals, so if you should come across a pair hunting or burrowing, it will probably be in the late summer or early fall, their mating season. Burrowing animals, like this mountain-dwelling marmot, typically have a back door, enabling it to slip away if an unwanted visitor comes knocking at its front door. With the adult marmot out of the way, the badger returns to the den to see what goodies might be left behind. Badgers are known to raid the nests of rodents for their young. In this way, they get the most meat for the least amount of energy. Although this badger pair will soon mate, they're still loners when it comes to matters of the stomach. Once they do mate, they will again go their separate ways to prepare for the winter. Like bears, they eat excessively in autumn to build up a layer of fat before either finding or digging a winter den. As stated, badgers mate in August and September. However, the cubs are not born until the following spring. The special process which allows them to mate in August and give birth in May is called delayed implantation. The fertilized eggs float free in the uterus until mid-February when the embryos attach themselves to the wall of the uterus and development continues. This process allows them to have their young in the spring. When food is plentiful and the weather is ideal for their survival. The female digs a special birthing den that is more spacious than a burrowing den and often has a number of tunnels, chambers, and turnarounds. The main chamber is a warm and comfortable environment in which to raise a family. Approximately six weeks later, the mother gives birth. Typically, a litter has between two to five cubs that are born blind and furred. Their eyes will open around the fourth week, at which time the mother begins to wean them. The cubs remain in the den for six weeks, nursing and sleeping. Badgers are very meticulous creatures, so as soon as the little ones start moving around, one of the first lessons they learn is housekeeping. There's a separate chamber in the den for burying feces, and the female promptly teaches the youngsters where the excrement chamber is located. Badgers often take over and enlarge an abandoned burrow near a prairie dog village. Conveniently, their pantry is now right next to their kitchen, providing for a comfortable existence. This relationship not only produces a healthy badger, but also a healthy ecosystem by keeping the rodent population under control. This mother badger's keen sense of smell leads her right to an unlucky prairie dog. Although not renowned for its speed, the Badger can run up to 10 miles per hour if the occasion calls for it. The mother returns to the den, where she's greeted by her two hungry cubs. As the summer progresses, so do the young badgers. At six weeks, the cubs begin to venture outside the den. They're half-grown at eight weeks and frequently accompany their mother hunting. By 10 weeks, the sow often withholds food from her young, which in turn encourages them to go hunting on their own.

[00:22:28] **Speaker 2** You

[00:22:40] **Speaker 1** Finally, the cubs get the message and head out alone. Another animal found among the tall grasses of the plains is the western box turtle. These reptiles are cold blooded, so they warm up in the morning sunshine, then spend the day searching for food. Their diet consists of berries, small plants, and insects. Often they're seen digging in cattle droppings in search of dung beetles. The dynamic duo spot this armored opportunity and immediately investigate. A box turtle's shell has a special dome shape that makes it almost impossible for predators to reach its vulnerable appendages. As one youngster tries in vain to get the meal out of the container, its sibling practices digging skills. Finally, enough is enough, and the rambunctious cub decides that digging might be more exciting than struggling with the turtle. Free at last, the turtle methodically continues on its way. Meanwhile, the comical pair, spurred on by their empty bellies, continue their search. Prairie dogs, unlike badgers, are very social creatures. Members of the same family typically greet each other by touching noses or lips in a kissing-like gesture. This is one fortunate prairie dog. It can be grateful that it ran into these inexperienced cubs and not their mother. Seemingly exasperated, these carefree critters take a break and lounge around in the dirt. Obviously, they still have a long way to go before becoming expert hunters like their parents. But the badger must be doing something right. While virtually all predator populations are declining, These down-to-earth diggers seem to be holding their own. Some say the best defense is a good offense. Maybe there is something to be said for being belligerent as a badger. I'm Marty Stouffer. Until next time, enjoy our Wild America!