For example, in the past, the investigation of bite mark wounds on dogs from badgers in Northern Ireland has required: a DNA swab of the site; a pathological description of the bite (Figs 1, 2); a microbiological culture of the bite; retrieval of hair samples from the animal being examined (Fig 3); and retrieval of soil from the coat of the animal being examined (Fig 4).

When taking DNA samples from a bite mark, a swab can be used on a wet sample. Dry samples can be enhanced by the use of ultrapure DNA-free water and not just sterile saline.

Badgers tend to have blunt canine teeth and this leads to a pathognomonic wound in their victims, which is usually a degloving wound. They tear and pull, tending to hang on tenaciously to an intruding dog’s lower jaw, rather than biting, puncturing and running as other animals do.

Due to this lack of penetration, the microbiology of a bite wound from a badger may reveal aerobic bacteria rather than the anaerobic types associated with deep puncture wounds.

Badger hair can be grossly identified and retrieved if on a dog, and this can be packaged in an envelope and sent for identification by microscopy.

The soil from a badger sett may contain class characteristics of soil, and
can be collected from a dog that has been suspected of being in a badger sett. This can be collected in a sample pot and sent off for analysis.

All five pieces of evidence are weak as individual pieces of evidence; however, when combined as independent sources of evidence they make a strong case for the resolution of a disputed animal bite. It is up to a court to decide whether the evidential burden required for a conviction has been met, not a veterinarian or anyone else.

An animal’s treatment must never be compromised by the collection and retrieval of evidence. Treatment must take priority over evidence retrieval.

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Investigating badger bites

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Updated information and services can be found at:
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