

GREEN ECONOMY

Offsets for Destruction?



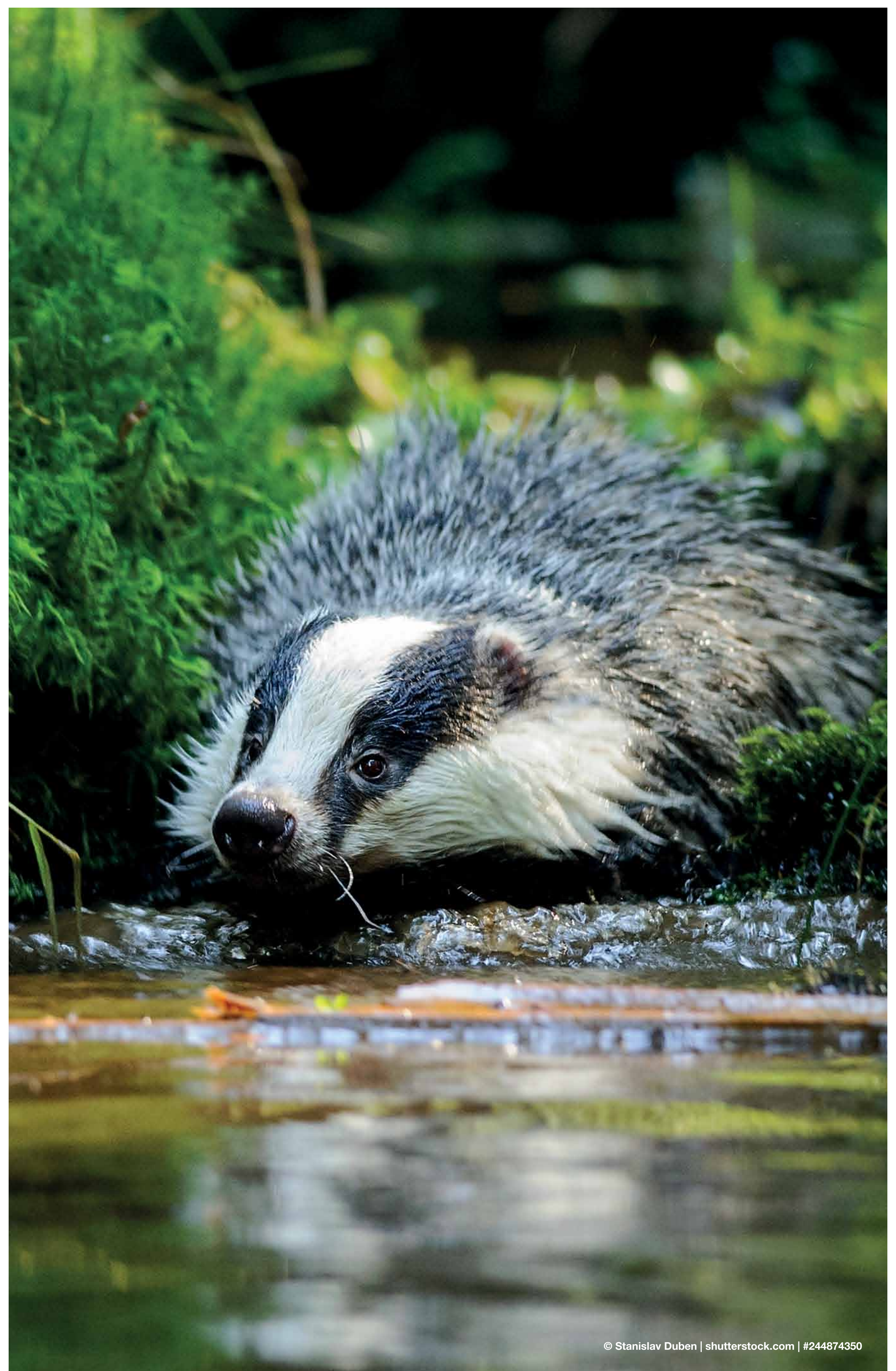
Credits Obtained for Nature

Is it possible to preserve or even increase nature while advancing housing development and economic growth? Gosforth Park¹¹ in North Tyneside, England, a natural area of particular scientific interest, was slated to make way for the construction of luxury housing. The local building authority would not have permitted the project due to the importance of the area. But the private investor and a service provider for compensation areas created a scheme for biodiversity offsets in order to compensate for the loss of the ecologically valuable sites of Gosforth Park at a different location. The proposed compensatory measures or “biodiversity offsets” ultimately convinced the state secretary to approve the project.

Profitable Business

Biodiversity offsets have been integrated in laws and directives related to conservation in many countries in recent years. They become effective after a series of steps have been examined prior to building measures such as avoiding or minimizing impacts or restoring ecosystems in their original location. Developers receive “biodiversity credits” if they compensate for the destruction of nature elsewhere. Trading with biodiversity credits has turned into a profitable business. Some companies have specialized in purchasing and pooling land in order to improve its ecological quality. Thus, developers can buy compensation measures in form of biodiversity credits without having to look for suitable land themselves.

A theme park in Brühl, Germany, for example, intends to build hotels, a concert hall and parking lots in a nature reserve of the Ville Forest owned by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. However, selling or leasing the land to the private investor would set a precedent in Germany. Because there are not enough high-quality areas for compensation, the theme park is considering the purchase of biodiversity credits from a major energy company. The predecessor of precisely that company restored the Ville Forest as a compensation measure for its lignite mining in the last century.



Swift Approval

Politicians and economists believe that biodiversity offsets are an effective tool to help to implement investment projects quickly and easily and create the impression that there is no loss of nature.

The following example shows how swiftly development projects can be approved if a compensation proposal has been submitted. In North Somerset¹², England, a third reactor was to be added to a nuclear power plant, a measure that would destroy the habitat of a rare bat species. Even before the investor requested permission from the infrastructure administration, the local building authority approved the clearing of the site so that it could be prepared for the controversial construction project. After negotiating with the municipality, the French investor committed himself to restore the original site in case the project was not approved. If the area had been degraded to such an extent that restoration would be impossible, a concept for offset measures elsewhere could be implemented.



¹¹<http://www.savegosforthwildlife.com/>

¹²Sullivan, Sian (2013): *After the Green Rush? Biodiversity Offsets, Uranium Power and the “Calculus of Casualties” in Greening Growth*. *Human Geography* 6 (1): 80-101
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