Badgers & TB
The History up to 2012

Historically tuberculosis (TB) is a much feared respiratory disease. Cattle can be infected by a bacterium called mycobacterium bovis (m.bovis). This is the same bacterium that can infect humans and badgers. Humans drinking untreated milk which had come from cattle with lesions on their udders led to them contracting TB. However most milk now is pasteurised and the chance of a member of the public catching TB is 1 in 2 million.

In 1935 at least 40% of cows in dairy herds had TB.

By 1960 a testing programme had reduced it to one herd in 50, but TB has never been completely eradicated, being a persistent problem particularly in South-West England.

In 1971 a dead badger on a Gloucestershire farm was found to have died of advanced TB. On looking into this further the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) decided TB was so well established in badgers that steps should be taken against badgers where they were seen to be a threat to cattle, i.e., the badgers should be killed. The 1973 Badgers Act allowed licences to be issued for just that purpose. It may seem incredible now but the preferred method of killing badgers then was by gassing, a process some farmers still advocate.

Over the years various reports have been commissioned to study the issues and come up with recommendations regarding the problem of TB, cattle and badgers.

In 1980 Lord Zuckerman concluded in his report that badgers did constitute a significant reservoir of bovine TB and that MAFF should carry on killing badgers, but not by gassing them. He also recommended a policy review in the future which led to the Dunnet Report in 1986. This report, while it implicated badgers in the TB outbreaks in the South-West of England did say it was not desirable to kill large numbers of healthy badgers in the process of trying to control TB. It is only after killing a badger and conducting a post mortem that it can be ascertained if it had TB. The report also recommended a test be developed that would detect TB in living badgers. By this time millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money had been spent in MAFF’s TB eradication policy, and thousands of badgers had been killed, most of them being free of TB. After the Dunnet Report it was accepted that complete eradication of TB was not a feasible aim.

Moving forward to 1996 a review was commissioned by the Government to investigate the link between TB and cattle and badgers. This review was chaired by Professor, now Lord, Krebs. A year later the Krebs Report concluded that “the sum of evidence strongly supports the view that in Britain badgers are a significant source of (TB) infection in cattle, although evidence is all indirect”. The report suggested as there was a lack of scientific data that a Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) be set up to see what effect killing badgers had on TB in cattle. The method of doing this was via the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) chaired by Professor Bourne, who set up a scheme intended to run for five years from December 1998. The idea was to select ten areas where TB in cattle had been relatively high in recent times. Within each area chosen there were to be three different strategies, one for each of three so-called “triplets”. “Pro-active” culling involved killing all the badgers in one triplet and then keeping that triplet clear of badgers for the rest of the trial. A second triplet would have “re-active” culling, i.e. killing all badgers associated with farms where TB had been confirmed. The third triplet was to have no badger killing at all. The point of this exercise was to monitor the levels of TB in cattle in the study areas to measure the effects of the three different strategies.

By November 2003 the then Animal Health and Welfare Minister, Ben Bradshaw, accepted the advice of the ISG and had to announce the suspension of "re-active" culling. The ISG had concluded that re-active culling could not be justified on scientific grounds. The culling actually increased TB infection in cattle in the surrounding areas by destabilising the badger population, thus weakening the group's immunity and making them less resistant to disease. What is known as the “perturbation effect”, where unsettled neighbouring badgers moved into vacant territory. These exposed the badgers on scientific grounds. The conclusion drawn was that it was better to concentrate on cattle controls. The National Federation of Badger Groups (now known as Badger Trust) stated that the link between bovine TB in badgers and cattle could not be broken by killing badgers.

In December 2005 the government announced new measures to tackle TB in cattle and this included a twelve week consultation on badger culling. The outcome was remarkable. There were 47,000 responses via letter and e-mail, thirteen petitions against a cull containing 12,100 signatures and there were 10,000 text messages. Of those numbers 4% of the total supported a cull, 0.4% were neutral, and 95.6% (45,415) were against a cull. Authoritative organisations such as The Mammal Society, Woodland Trust, The Royal Society, RSPCA, and Wildlife Trusts expressed their grave
reservations about culling.

On 7th July 2008 Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, announced that a wholesale cull of badgers was not going to be part of the government's new package of measures to try to control TB in cattle. He announced the setting up of a Bovine TB Partnership Group which is intended to focus on other measures to control the disease, and vaccination is high on the list. This announcement rather left Elin Jones, Rural Affairs Minister in Wales out on a limb. In 2008 she issued a statement to the National Assembly for Wales about her plans for a TB eradication programme. What she said was widely interpreted as authorising a badger cull. Badger Trust made the opening moves to have this decision judicially reviewed and the Welsh Assembly Legal Services Department had the task of trying to explain what the Minister had really meant by her announcement as opposed to what just about everyone had interpreted her to mean. Apparently she had not made a decision to kill badgers in Wales after all. However, her statement and that of Mr Benn do make for interesting comparison.

The above paragraphs give a flavour of just how complex and contentious the issue of badgers, cattle and TB is. Tens of thousands of badgers have been killed over the last 30 years, many of them inhumanely, in pursuit of data and solutions to the problem of controlling TB. However, TB in cattle has not decreased in this time, it has increased.

Do badgers give TB to cattle? Cattle give TB to cattle and there is a strong case for saying - cattle give TB to badgers. When badgers and Cattle in the same area have TB, it is not proof that the badgers infected the cattle. Very few badgers in fact have TB. Of those that have, fewer still are infectious. Infectious badgers or cattle pass the bacteria out through their urine, faeces, or even their breath. These bacteria can then be picked up by other animals. The scope for passing on the infection in pasture shared by badgers and cattle is clear, but as is pointed out above, tens of thousands of badgers killed in the last 30 years or so has to be looked at against the statistic that TB in cattle in the same period has increased.

At last we seemed to have reached the stage where the decision-makers could see that all the killing has proved is that killing badgers is not the solution. Other issues that have to be addressed include the quality of animal husbandry practised by some farmers. If this is of a poor standard it can allow badgers into farm buildings, water troughs, cattle feed areas and so on.

The unreliability of the TB test in cattle is another factor to be addressed.

The dreadful outbreak of Foot & Mouth Disease produced some interesting side effects. TB testing was suspended during the epidemic. Many cattle were kept indoors together, so that infectious cattle could infect others. Later, when TB testing resumed, more cattle were found to have TB. Farmers re-stocking after losing cattle through Foot & Mouth bought untested cattle some of whom were carrying TB. This helped to spread the disease to previously TB free areas.

Throughout that period badgers were not moving around Britain, so it is difficult to see how those new outbreaks of TB could be blamed on them.

No-one can ignore the effect on farmers of losing cattle to TB or suspected TB (cattle found to be infected with TB must be slaughtered and movement restrictions are put in place), and looking for a scapegoat is a natural reaction. However, it is illogical and against sound science to simply blame badgers. All the scientific advice, with the exception of one hurriedly compiled and universally condemned report (the author of which has been described by Lord Krebs as "isolated"), is that culling badgers makes no meaningful contribution to controlling TB in cattle. The advice is that more stringent TB testing will help to control the disease. Statistically, moving cattle on to a farm is the biggest risk factor for a herd acquiring TB. That is not a badger-related risk. Mr Benn flagged up the need for farmers to take responsibility for the burden of TB control. Defra advised that farmers should try to prevent contact between cattle on neighbouring farms, and that the cattle coming on to farms are healthy. They also urged that strict biosecurity measures are implemented, that cattle are bought from tested herds which are shown to be disease free and that farmers seek veterinary advice to address the health and welfare needs of their herds. The government stressed it is not just their problem, but looked for contributions from farmers, vets, and wildlife groups. Cattle movements substantially and consistently outweigh all other factors in predicting TB outbreaks.

If you have got this far then you are clearly interested in getting to grips with understanding what is a complex problem for the farming industry and, as a result, for the future safety and welfare of badgers. There is a wealth of detailed information available on websites. One such is Badger Trust at. www.badgertrust.org.uk where amongst other things you can read detailed comment on the anti-badger announcements of the Farmers Union, the NFU. Another site with detailed information and access to reports is the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) site at www.defra.gov.uk where you need to look for the Animal health and welfare pages.

Ed: When the coalition came to power the situation changed dramatically. The UK Government carried out a second consultation on culling for England that many consider flawed. It concluded that another series of culling trials should be carried out, initially, to determine whether baiting and free shooting was humane and effective. It said that it was not against vaccination, but believes that the approach will be more successful when an edible formulation becomes available to supplant the existing injectable dose but this could take 4 or 5 years. Trials by the Gloucester Wildlife Trust and in other areas indicate injecting is viable but is more expensive than culling.

Briefly, in our adjacent countries – Scotland is free of bTB, Wales and Northern Ireland are vaccinating badgers. Ireland is snaring then shooting badgers. This has reduced bTB by an insignificant amount at enormous cost to the Irish taxpayer. It is hoped that their vaccination trials will convince them that their current costly cruel policy can stop.

Everyone appears to be moving towards vaccination as the effective, humane means of reducing bTB, coupled with getting all farmers to adhere to stringent controls on the testing and movement of cattle and to adopt better bio-security and husbandry. Unfortunately farmers do not want to spend money while they can maintain the misguided belief that there is a cheaper alternative – culling badgers. Equally unfortunately Coalition politicians see culling as a quick fix.
The situation in September 2013

Now that official badger killing has started the Badger Trust will use this special version of its normal logo in cull-related communications. It was created by Pat Williams from West Surrey Badger Group.

The origin and background of the following articles and updates on the current position can be found on the Badger Trust website www.badgertrust.org.uk

Badger Trust will surely be in need of extra funds. If you are able to help them with money – please send it to Badger trust, PO box 708, East Grinstead, East Sussex RH19 2WN.

Official shooting breaks out in the night 27th August 2013

The worst and most cynical onslaught ever against the British badger, a protected wildlife species, has now begun. This travesty of both science and sense is in the vain hope that killing badgers could have some meaningful effect on bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in England. The Coalition has threatened that eventually up to 100,000 badgers could be killed in the present scheme which is, at the insistence of the cattle industry, supported by Ministers. The scientific necessity of short-term simultaneous killing has been ignored while an attack on cattle-to-cattle infection, the principal cause of bTB, was inexcusably delayed for decades until now. David Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust, said: ‘The Trust is determined to fight on wherever possible as we have in the past through all legal avenues. Members will scrutinise everything that happens and the Trust will continue to take the best legal and scientific advice.’

We urge people living in the pilot culling areas of West Gloucestershire and West Somerset to listen for shooting, look out for wounded badgers and report all locations as accurately as possible to staff@badgertrust.org.uk or phone 0845 828 7878. However, on no account must anyone enter private land or attempt to interfere with the shooters and staff. Some badgers could be wounded either by the official shooters or opportunist criminals who may assume open season has been declared. A detailed set of guidelines for the public has been compiled by Pauline Kidner and Dr. Elizabeth Mullineaux PhD, MRCVS, at Secret World Wildlife Rescue (SWWR) at Hightbridge, Somerset. It covers:

• the need to gather clinical and topographical data on finding an injured badger;
• how to contact veterinary surgeons;
• what to ask for;
• arrangements for any post mortems.

Groups and supporters are asked to contact veterinary surgeons and wildlife hospitals in the two pilot areas to ensure action is taken if wounded badgers are found and that consistent and accurate records are kept. The official monitoring, as proposed, is pathetically thin with only two people a night watching to ensure efficiency, safety and humaneness. A report on the likelihood of these being achieved has been so heavily censored as to be useless.

THE FIRST shots in an unprecedented slaughter of badgers have been fired. Licensed “marksmen” taking part in Government-sanctioned pilot culls are attempting to kill around 5,000 badgers in pre-selected areas of Gloucestershire and Somerset. The objective of the culls is not—as the media often claim—to control bovine TB but simply to try to justify free shooting at night and to demonstrate in the Government’s words, that it is “efficacious, humane and safe”. If the slaughter is deemed to meet those criteria—and an independent panel will decide—the Government intends to authorise 10 more culls next year and 10 more in each of the following three years.

Over 100,000 badgers, around a third of the total number in the UK, could die. Inevitably many will be horrendously wounded. Among the dead will be immature cubs and most likely pregnant sows. And for what? At best, using highly speculative forecasts, the Government says the spread of bTB could be reduced by 12-16% over nine years. But that leaves 80% of the problem not caused by badgers unresolved. This includes ineffective TB testing, poor cattle management, inadequate disease-prevention measures on farms, and massive movements of cattle from farm to farm. A fact that Defra, the department responsible for animal disease control, remains remarkably loathe to highlight.

Government ministers, like Secretary of State Owen Paterson, constantly claim all that can be done has been done to control this highly infectious respiratory disease. But critics, among them virtually all of the country’s top independent animal disease experts, disagree.

The Government lamely claims it has science on its side. Plainly it hasn’t. A 10-year peer-reviewed science-led research project, the Randomised Badger Culling Trials (RBCT) conducted by the Independent Scientific Group (ISG) concluded that badger slaughter would make no meaningful contribution to bTB control and that robust cattle-based measures provided the way forward. Badger Trust agrees. We share the widely held view that the key conclusions of the report have been distorted and cherry-picked in a vain attempt to justify a mass cull of badgers which the farming unions have consistently advocated.

Badger Trust remains totally opposed to this futile slaughter which could increase bTB, cause immense harm to farming families, and which must pose a danger to the public. The solution to bTB lies in tougher controls over cattle movements (millions of them each year in the UK), more effective testing (the traditional skin test is unreliable), better husbandry, sensible disease-prevention measures and the increasing use of vaccination, first for badgers but ultimately for all cattle. See the Badger Trust website, which is soon to be replaced and updated, you can look back at the evidence Badger Trust has produced (see our news releases) to argue against this politically driven and massively unpopular cull.

To learn more about bovine TB see our Q&A at: http://www.badgertrust.org.uk/_Attachments/Resources/534_S4.pdf

Meanwhile if you would like to help. Add your name to the record-breaking e-petition.

Go to http://www.epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/38257
The Cull of Badgers in England has started

The large-scale cull of badgers in England has started, allowing animals to be killed over a 300 km² area in West Gloucestershire. The government hopes that this first of many licences and the consequent death of an estimated 100,000 badgers will help curb the scourge of TB in cattle, which led to 26,000 cows being slaughtered in 2011.

As asked if the granting of the license was a positive first step in a nationwide roll out of the cull, the environment secretary, Owen Paterson, said: “Yes, I very much hope so.”

Badgers can carry bovine TB but the scientists who led a decade long trial of culling concluded it could make “no meaningful contribution”, and was “not an effective way” to control the disease. “In pursuing this nonsensical policy, the government appears to have scant regard for scientific evidence, animal welfare or wildlife protection, and is betraying farmers with a bloody and pointless slaughter that will not solve their problem,” said Mark Jones, veterinarian and executive director of Humane Society International. HSI has lodged a complaint against the government with the Bern Convention, a European treaty to protect wildlife. The Badger Trust has also pledged to pursue any legal route to challenge culling licences.

Owen Paterson, a strong supporter of the cull, said: “I want to see a prosperous, healthy badger population living alongside healthy cattle. We would all like to have a vaccine but we have not got one. So we should use the measures used effectively in other countries to bear down on the disease in wildlife and in cattle.” The previous Labour government said an oral badger vaccine would be ready by 2015. The coalition cancelled five of six trials of injectable vaccines, and said a viable oral vaccine was “years away”.

The decade-long trial indicated that if heavy culling was continued for years, then a 16% drop in bovine TB cases could be seen. But the new culls will use a different killing method and the cull in Gloucestershire, and one expected in Somerset, are intended to test whether the less expensive shooting of free-running animals is as effective as the cage-trapping and shooting used before.

The issuing of the licence by Natural England, means that groups of farmers and landowners can cull over a continuous six-week period every year for the next four years and have to kill at least 70% of the local population. “Maximum numbers will be specified to prevent the risk of local extinction,” said a statement from Natural England.

Over the past year many leading naturalists, scientists and other eminent people have expressed their opposition to the cull

Ed: Although their views were expressed before the cull started, they now apply to their belief it should not continue.

The RSPB said that they would be vaccinating badgers on its land at Highnam Woods in Gloucestershire, which lies just outside the newly licenced culling zone. “The dairy industry has endured terrible times while trying to cope with this devastating disease,” said the RSPB’s Martin Harper. “However, we have never been convinced that the best way to help farmers is to force them to foot the bill for a contentious cull that is only expected to reduce outbreaks by about 16%. This is a lot of effort for a small gain. Bovine TB needs tackling properly and we believe vaccination offers the best hope for cattle, badgers and the industry.”

Sir David Attenborough and Simon King OBE expressed their extreme sadness in 2012 at the Coalition Government’s plans to shoot badgers in England despite overwhelming scientific evidence against culling as a solution to bTB in cattle:

Their remarks followed the news that Natural England had issued the first licence for a pilot badger cull in Gloucestershire, and planned to issue a second for Somerset shortly. They added: “Even Lord Krebs has described the proposed cull as ‘crazy’”. Lord Krebs designed the £50 million culling trials of 1998-2007 and is now Principal of Jesus College, Oxford.

Sir David Attenborough and Simon King OBE said: “We are extremely saddened by the Government’s determination to proceed with culling when there are alternatives that could meet multiple policy objectives – reduce bTB in badgers and cattle AND prevent the unnecessary killing and maiming of one of Britain’s best loved wild mammals”. They pointed out that wildlife filmmakers in this country have spent the last six decades trying to inspire and promote understanding and respect for wildlife both nationally and internationally. They ask, “How can we now expect any other nation, especially a poor developing country, to conserve its wildlife whenever there is a conflict with short-term economic and political interests?”

The Chairman of the Badger Trust, David Williams, stresses: “Badgers have been killed since 1975 to stop the spread of bTB and the scientific data shows, repeatedly, that it just does not work”.

Many leading scientists have stated that a cull this autumn will not work and may even increase the spread of bTB. Since 2007, the majority of scientists have advocated the vaccination of badgers and ultimately of cattle as a far better and more cost-effective option. They are surprised that successive Governments have not embraced this approach more whole-heartedly and the Badger Trust regularly hears from scientists that it has been like banging their heads against a brick wall.

The Badger Trust is adamantly that the UK Government should be leading the world by example at a time when wild species across the planet are declining rapidly. It should apply win-win solutions such as vaccination that balance the needs of farmers, badgers and the public interest. Instead it chooses to press ahead with killing thousands if not hundreds of thousands of one of Britain’s most iconic wild species. This is despite the deep reservations of scientists and 69 per cent of the public who responded to the Coalition’s own consultation.

Chris Packham, the broadcaster and naturalist, has joined the Badger Trust’s campaign and says: “This is the darkest day for badgers in Britain and a shameful one for all of us. Britain prides itself on its excellence in the field of science and technology, and yet science is being forsaken and badgers are about to be sacrificed for no apparent sensible reason. It’s simply unforgivable.”
Sir Roger Moore, Dame Judi Dench, Joanna Lumley, Brian Blessed, Martin Shaw, Anthony Head and Virginia McKenna OBE are among over one hundred celebrities, scientists, naturalists, veterinarians and leading animal welfare and conservation groups to have signed a statement calling on the Government to stop the badger cull. In a plea for compassion, the signatories ask the Government for its policy of killing to be abandoned and replaced with more scientifically credible, humane and effective solutions to tackling bovine TB (bTB).

The joint statement made before the cull started reads:

“We the undersigned ask the government to stop the badger cull and to implement instead the more sustainable and humane solution of vaccination, improved testing and better bio-security.”

Two pilot culls intended to test the safety, efficacy and humaneness of killing badgers by free shooting or cage trapping and shooting are planned to begin any day now for a period of six weeks in undisclosed areas of West Somerset and West Gloucestershire. If deemed successful, these plans could then be rolled out further, throughout the West Country to Derbyshire and the Midlands, in the mistaken belief that killing badgers will have a significant impact on the spread of bTB. Up to ten licences will be issued each year for four years, possibly resulting in the killing of as many as 130,000 badgers according to Natural England.

The signatories stand in solidarity with 263,000 members of the British public who have so far signed the Stop the Cull petition launched by astrophysicist and rock guitarist Dr Brian May. It is the most successful ever H.M. Government e-petition. Brian May founded Team Badger whose member groups including Save Me, Care For The Wild International, the League Against Cruel Sports, IFAW, Humane Society International/UK, Blue Badger and the RSPCA, have been joined by a host of other organisations adding their support to the joint statement, such as the RSPB, Woodland Trust, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. Their joint outreach is to approximately four million members of the public, who subscribe to these organisations in order to protect wildlife and conserve the countryside for future generations. (For a full list of signatories see Badger Trust website).

Brian May – Save Me, said: “On behalf of supporters of the Save-Me campaign and 263,000 signatories of the anti-badger cull petition on the Government's website, we would like to remind the Government that there is massive public opposition to this ill-fated cull, which, it is becoming ever more clear, will not be of any advantage to cattle or farmers. The Government is acting, for political motives, on a course which cannot succeed in eradicating Bovine TB. We urge David Cameron to take positive action to accelerate progress towards vaccination of wildlife and, most importantly, vaccination of the source of bTB in this country, cattle, along with full review of the skin test method of removing supposed reactive animals from herds, and an overhaul of biosecurity and movement control measures."

Simon King said: "Ten years of study, the leading scientific brains, all said the cull of badgers will do nothing to improve the condition of cows and more importantly the status of bovine tuberculosis in the British Isles. This cull is a travesty – do not let it happen. We all want to see an end to Bovine Tuberculosis in the British Isles. Killing badgers is not the way forward. All the science clearly points to the cull being a waste of time, a waste of money and a waste of life. Ban the cull.”

The organisations within Team Badger and the Badger Trust which has issued this news release on behalf of all signatories, care equally about badgers and cattle and do not believe a cull is the answer to bovine TB. Science shows that a cull will be of little help in reducing this disease in cattle and yet at least 70% of the badger population – the majority of which is likely to be healthy - will be wiped out in the pilot areas, a virtual elimination of this iconic British countryside for future generations. (For a full list of signatories see Badger Trust website).

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Culling badgers could increase the problem of TB in cattle

Badger culling risks becoming a costly distraction from nationwide TB control - The Observer, Sunday 14 October 2012

Bovine tuberculosis is a serious problem for UK farmers, deserving the highest standard of evidence-based management. The government's TB-control policy for England includes licensing farmers to cull badgers. As scientists with expertise in managing wildlife and wildlife diseases, we believe the complexities of TB transmission mean that licensed culling risks increasing cattle TB rather than reducing it.

Even if such increases do not materialise, the government predicts only limited benefits, insufficient to offset the costs for either farmers or taxpayers. Unfortunately, the imminent pilot culls are too small and too short term to measure the impacts of licensed culling on cattle TB before a wider roll-out of the approach. The necessarily stringent licensing conditions mean that many TB-affected areas of England will remain ineligible for such culling. We are concerned that badger culling risks becoming a costly distraction from nationwide TB control.

We recognise the importance of eradicating bovine TB and agree that this will require tackling the disease in badgers. Unfortunately, culling badgers as planned is very unlikely to contribute to TB eradication. We therefore urge the government to reconsider its strategy.

signed

Professor Sir Patrick Bateson FRS University of Cambridge and president of the Zoological Society of London, and 31 others -

Professor Mike Begon, University of Liverpool;
Professor Tim Blackburn, Zoological Society of London;
Professor John Bourne CBE, former Chairman, Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB;
Professor William Sutherland, University of Cambridge;
Professor Terry Burke, University of Sheffield;
Dr Chris Cheeseman, formerly Food & Environment Research Agency;
Professor Sarah Cleaveland, University of Glasgow;
Professor Tim Clutton Brock FRS, University of Cambridge;
Professor Andrew Dobson, Princeton University;
PM wants to kill badgers to save them!

Ed: and some of the media are trying to bolster his case by replacing fact with exaggeration – so what's new?

The Prime Minister and his friends in the cattle industry are busy trying to brainwash the public about killing badgers. 'Pilot' culls have begun and there is an increasing barrage of propaganda to soften up public opinion with outrageous and unsubstantiated claims about bovine tuberculosis (bTB) and its impact.

David Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust, said: “Mr Cameron told BBC’s Radio 4 that there could be ‘...appalling consequences for badgers’ if the culls did not go ahead. The Trust says it beggars belief that he is forgetting the horrific reality of the slaughter he is backing. More than 100,000 badgers, the vast majority disease free, will be slaughtered or maimed. Nothing could be more appalling than that”.

The PM also said the Government could spend “another billion pounds” dealing with the consequences of bovine TB if culls were not carried out, but killing the animals would have only a marginal effect in the long run. But with an eventual benefit of only 12-16% at best the compensation bill will be barely affected. New restrictions introduced this year at the insistence of the European Commission are likely to have a real and lasting effect. They are similar to the successful Area Eradication Scheme of the immediate post war years which did not include any assaults on wildlife.

Mr Williams added: “Mr Cameron boasts that the Coalition had the political courage to help the countryside, whereas culling will help no one other than those who wish to kill any wildlife at will anywhere. Successive governments should have called the cattle industry to heel 20 years ago when it was resisting pre-movement restrictions, cattle movement monitoring and more frequent testing. In the meantime the number of cattle slaughtered was rising from about 1,000 a year on average to almost 38,000 last year. This tragic outcome followed 20 years of stability with various local badger culling schemes making no difference, and even now the new but long overdue cattle-based policies are not being given time to have an impact before the killing”.

The pre-cull smokescreen has recently included, in the Daily Telegraph:

- June 2: a farmer in Gloucestershire tearful about losing cattle for which he is compensated, a member of the industry that kills prematurely ten times as many cattle for diseases other than bTB;
- June 2: the British Veterinary Association saying the only weapon Britain has against bTB is killing badgers, repeating the myth that no other country has controlled the disease without killing wildlife – forgetting the UK itself which did just that from 1950 to 1990;
- July 28: overblown tales of terror (one farmer) in Derbyshire, where the county council has decided not to allow culling on its land;

Those who see badger killing as a cheap shortcut or even as a salve to their discomfiture at being rebuffed in the past are, like the lady in the play Hamlet, protesting too much.

How much of the problem is caused by farmers flouting the law?

Milk from infected cattle near Tewkesbury has been sold into the food chain since October 2010. A farmer in Weston Super Mare has been found to be ignoring cattle movement controls, which undermines all the efforts to reduce the spread of TB from cattle to cattle. How many more examples of this appalling behaviour are there? Are they the tip of the iceberg or isolated cases? It is doubtful if we will ever know.

There are small examples of sanity prevailing!

County Bans Badger Culling on all its Council land

Extracted from Daily Telegraph 24.7.13

Derbyshire has become the first county in Britain to ban badger culling on land that it owns. The County Council branded culling “cruel” and called on the Government to rethink its policy on controlling the wild
animals. It says it based its decision on scientific evidence and suggested that culling badgers increases the spread of TB, the disease the cull is proposed to prevent. The Council also fears that allowing culling on its land will promote illegal badger baiting. Instead, it will support a programme to vaccinate badgers against the disease.

Derbyshire county councillors fear the culling will spread to their county which is a TB “high risk” area. Anne Western, the Council leader, said: “We are proud to live in Derbyshire which is one of the most beautiful rural counties in the country. That is why we want to protect our natural wildlife for which Derbyshire is famous. By banning culling on our land and allowing Derbyshire Wildlife Trust to vaccinate our badgers, we are dealing with the problem of TB head on.

Culling is not only cruel but it is bad news for our farmers who are more likely to get infected herds of cattle. I hope that the Government eventually follows our lead and listens to the science that says culling is bad for our countryside.”

In September last year the Forest of Dean District Council in Gloucestershire voted to ban culling on Council land.

### Judge orders changes to NFU injunction 22.8.13

The Badger Trust is relieved that lawful protest against the pointless badger cull has been protected by the High Court. The NFU stated in open court that they have no objection to lawful and proper protest about the cull and were not seeking to restrict this. Their initial application was not accepted and after hearing argument by the Badger Trust a far more reasoned and balanced order was made protecting the rights of the Badger Trust and others to campaign for a change in this foolhardy policy. The Badger Trust will continue to highlight the folly of this policy that will neither reduce TB in a meaningful way nor help the badger population. The Badger Trust was joined to proceedings as an interested party and was there to assist the court. Mr Justice Turner confirmed the importance of protecting the right to protest and made an order against harassment of those involved in the cull and was keen to protect people’s homes. The Badger Trust in no way supports unlawful protest. The order is therefore a welcome confirmation that those concerned about this pointless nature of this cull and engage in more helpful methods of TB control rather than killing badgers”.

### Badgers are dying needlessly! Late October 2013

Can you do anything to stop the cull? You can’t stop it but you can let the Coalition know you oppose it! They may eventually come to their senses.

The Badger Trust has recommended two e-petitions:
- The first with 304,143 signatories, closed on 9.9.13.
- The second had 6,765 signatories by 28.10.13 – we need more!

1. PLEASE ADD YOUR NAME online.
   - Go to www.badgertrust.org.uk
   - Click on ‘Add your name to the NEW e-petition’ and enter your details.
2. Please get your friends & relations to sign the e-petition.
3. You can also write to your MP.

*Ed:* We must keep the pressure on, particularly as the cull is in disarray, with poor results and mounting costs. We have always said that culling badgers will not be cost effective. The money would be better spent on rigorously implementing the current cattle regulations and improving farming practices, which could include vaccination of badgers and cattle. This is apart from not wanting to kill off part of our wildlife heritage.

### The situation in December 2013

Pat Williams of the West Surrey Badger Group created this picture to represent the scandalous loss of badger life.

The origin and background of the following articles and updates on the current position can be found on the Badger Trust website www.badgertrust.org.uk

Badger Trust will surely be in need of extra funds. If you are able to help them with money – please send it to Badger trust, PO box 708, East Grinstead, East Sussex RH19 2WN.

### Badger culling pilot trial abandoned

Mr Owen Paterson, the Coalition and the cattle industry have wasted the lives of many hundreds of badgers and have suffered a humiliating and inevitable setback with the reported abandonment this weekend of extended badger killing in Gloucestershire.

The controversial free shooting method used departed far beyond any scientific precedent and even beyond its own original terms of reference. Cage trapping and shooting in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial lasted only 11 days, but
Ministers and officials said on 6 occasions that 6 weeks would be necessary for the pilot trials. They then extended them to 9 weeks in Somerset and a disgraceful 14 weeks in Gloucestershire.

Natural England is responsible for issuing the culling licences, but its board was divided when it recently decided to allow the two-month extension of the Gloucestershire culling period. This was against the advice of Prof. David Macdonald, chairman of its Science Advisory Committee and a board member.

The Badger Trust, which has been in constant communication with Natural England and Defra, eventually received the minutes of the meeting disclosed under the Environmental Information Regulations. As recently as Tuesday November 26, the Trust was pressing for the numbers slaughtered to be revealed.

Prof. Macdonald, of Oxford University, told The Guardian last month: "My personal opinion as a biologist [is] not to continue the cull. One could not have significant comfort that the original proposals would deliver gains to farmers. Extending the cull would make the outcome even less predictable and even more unpromising."

David Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust, said: “This ill-advised cut-rate shambles has involved miscalculation of badger populations, manipulated time scales, huge expense for the taxpayer in policing costs, and the fiasco of repeatedly-missed targets. If it was not so serious it would be comical and should never have happened in the first place”.

If culling is rolled out in affected areas of England next year as threatened it would have to be by the cage trapping and shooting method at up to ten times the cost to farmers.

What Mr Paterson did not say about bovine TB

The Defra Secretary of State has told MPs a string of whopping half-truths about his campaign on bovine TB (bTB). David Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust said: “Once again Mr Paterson’s serious omissions give the impression that he is thinking it all up as he goes along”. Mr Williams fills in the parts Mr Paterson left out.

1. Mr Paterson said in answer to a Question on November 21st: “I wish we could go back to the bipartisan approach of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, when we got this disease beaten – we got it down to 0.01%”. He failed to say that this was achieved by rigorous area-by-area cattle movement controls and rigorous annual testing. There was no assault on wildlife of the kind he is now inflicting on badgers.

2. The Secretary of State told an even worse half-truth: “. . . we are following the science from Australia, which is TB-free; we are following the science from New Zealand, which is down from 1,763 infected herds to 66; He failed to say the UK brought the number of cattle slaughtered down from 25,000 in 1950 to 2,081 in 1970 without any slaughter of wildlife, and the toll remained below that level for 20 years. The low point was 513 in one year. That was a reduction of 98% compared with 94% in New Zealand, which slaughtered possums.

3. Mr Paterson said the Coalition was following the science from the Republic of Ireland, where reactors were down from 40,000 to 18,500. He ignored Northern Ireland which also halved the number of cattle lost over an equivalent period of nine years, but did so without killing wildlife. Robust cattle control programmes, the real solution, were imposed in all the countries he mentioned, but were recklessly abandoned in the UK.

4. He praised those who conducted the cull in Somerset, and said they were convinced there had been a significant reduction in the number of diseased badgers. He failed to explain that shot badgers carcasses were not being tested for bTB and did not explain how anyone knew there had been a significant reduction in diseased badgers.

Ed: Can we expect another set of half truths to justify continuing the cull in other parts of the country?

Shutting the cowshed door after the plague got in

The Badger Trust welcomes the recent flurry of announcements of measures under consideration to control transmission of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) between cattle and between camelids and alpacas, but depletes the 20-year delay in producing them. Crucially Defra is proposing to impose a zero tolerance policy on English farmers with overdue herd tests.

David Williams, chairman of the Badger Trust, said: “Overdue tests have been a scandal for decades. The cattle industry has stubbornly resisted sensible restrictions on cattle management since the catastrophic rise in bTB began in the early 1990s. Farmers used badgers as scapegoats while they dug their heels in against better regulation of markets and abattoirs, more frequent and improved testing, pre-movement testing and comprehensive biosecurity on farms.

“If the measures we had listed been in place when the cattle toll averaged a 1,000 a year it would never have risen to its present level of almost 30,000.

From next year farmers who have not arranged for bTB surveillance and check tests to be carried out by the due date will face cuts to their subsidies. The level of reduction will depend on the length of time the test was overdue.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Paterson, admitted in a Commons statement on
November 28th that he was addressing a number of “long-standing weaknesses in our bovine TB controls”. Some of these weaknesses were strengthened a year ago, but only at the insistence of the EU. They included annual testing in the south west of England and zoning restrictions.

He proposes consultations on various proposals rather than acting on any of them – action that should have been taken years ago. He also proposes the pre-movement testing exemption for movements of cattle to and from common land. Also, the lifting of bovine TB restrictions on parts of a restricted holding could be phased out. In future the whole of a holding would be either restricted or officially TB free at any one time. Farmers would be “encouraged” to share details of the disease history of any cattle they sell so buyers would be finally better able to manage any disease risks.

Biosecurity study in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has published the results of a two-year study of farm biosecurity measures to assess badger- and cattle-related risk factors for bovine TB breakdowns and the associated biosecurity measures. It recommends further investigation of specific areas such as the potential role of contiguous spread across farm boundaries and greater exploration of the role of cattle movement is recommended. The report also says farmers should be encouraged to use established biosecurity measures to separate badgers and cattle. The majority of farm boundaries in the study area would have facilitated nose-to-nose contact with cattle on neighbouring farms and the survey team recommends closed herds or pre- and/or post- movement bTB testing and isolation of purchased animals.

Alpacas and llamas

In yet another much-needed improvement Defra is “seeking the views” of alpaca and llama owners by January 10th 2014 about how much could be done to prevent the spread of bovine TB in and among herds but any measures will still only be voluntary, so failing to close yet another gap in security.

The situation in January 2014

The following is based on an article in MailOnline by Fiona Macrae. 6.1.14

She quotes from figures released by the animal charity ‘Care for the Wild’. It described the cull as ‘one of the most disastrous and expensive in history’

Care of the Wild pieced together the cull's cost from answers to parliamentary questions, statistics from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and Freedom of Information requests.

This put the total cost for at £7.3 million or £4,121 for each of the 1,771 dead badgers. The taxpayer would have picked up the bulk of this - some £5.8 million.

This included £2.66 million for policing the culls, which attracted protestors, and included the cost of overtime, helicopters and four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Another £3.2 million is estimated to have been spent by Defra and other Government departments on projects including pinpointing the location of badger setts and monitoring the cull's humaneness. Farmers, who paid for the marksmen, were billed an estimated £1.49 million.

Care for the Wild has also calculated that if the culls are run annually for four years, as planned, the total bill will come to £19 million.

However, even if the cull did lead to a drop in TB among cattle, the taxpayer's bill, including compensation for cattle that have to be destroyed, would only fall by £2.5 million.

Dominic Dyer, the charity's policy advisor, said: Taxpayers will not benefit from badgers being killed, the badgers certainly won't benefit - and neither will the farmers because culling was always going to be a costly failure.

'It's time the Government realised that.'

The National Farmers' Union said: 'If marksmen had been allowed to go about their lawful business, there wouldn't have been any policing costs.'

Ed: You do the maths! We await the defra report on whether it has been humane and effective – I cannot say that I have much faith in this being accurate and its conclusions meaningful. Now at the start of 2014 as the breeding season gets under way and culling cannot proceed, the situation is still far from safe for our badgers: 

- The Coalition still seems intent on bowing to pressure from the farming community to roll out an extensive cull in bTB high risk areas later this year.
- Suggestions of using gas as a more effective means of culling have been put forward.
- Vaccination trials are ongoing.
- We must remain alert.