



Police Investigations Launched As Wildlife Crime Increases in Suffolk!

You may have already read in the papers, heard on the radio, or seen on tv, or even noted on our Facebook / Twitter page, that the wildlife here in Suffolk is still being persecuted!

Back in March, we had the horrendous incident of a badger caught in a drag snare, hanging from a bridge. On Friday 14th December, a report came in that 8 badgers had been found in a water filled ditch at Westleton, neighbouring village to that of Dunwich and RSPB reserve "Minsmere." Why would anyone want to kill such a large number of badgers? Thankfully, here in Suffolk, we do not have Bovine TB, we do not have the cattle numbers and densities they have in the south west, so what would be the motive, surely this was not just for so called "sport?" Whatever the reason the facts remain, it is illegal to wilfully kill, injure, take or attempt to kill, injure or take a badger. It is also against the law to dig for a badger; interfere with, damage, or destroy a badger sett or obstruct access to a sett. The threat of a badger cull this summer in other parts of the country where Bovine TB incidence is high, will not give the go ahead to a slaughter of badgers here in Suffolk.

This was no accident, the ditch was not too deep that the badgers couldn't climb out. Further developments in this Westleton case are that several pigs & deer in the area have been found shot dead, also being targeted are birds of prey. If anyone has any information or spots anything suspicious in the area then please telephone the police immediately with any details such as number plates etc but please do not approach any suspects.

Recently several other incidents involving wildlife crime have been reported in the press here in Suffolk. The Hunting Act 2004 came into effect on 18 February 2005. It bans the hunting with dogs, wild mammals in England and Wales, including fox, deer, hare and mink. Yet hare coursing has been reported in Hitcham (where the landowner was driven at and knocked down!), in Framlingham and most recently at Kirton, Felixstowe and Alderton. All men found involved have so far been from outside of Suffolk!

The Suffolk Badger & Other Mammals Group aim to promote the conservation of badgers & other mammals in Suffolk. It also offers advice to landowners and householders with concerns involving badgers. With financial cuts to the National Wildlife Crime Unit thankfully resolved for a year, pressure is building for local police and other organisations to protect the wildlife. Please do not let wildlife criminals target Suffolk and get away with it.

Special points of interest:

- Latest on the badger cull
- Suffolk badger update
- AGM 2012
- Badger Trust conference
- Polecats in Suffolk?
- Hedgehog data wanted.
- Can infra red camera's enable sett closures during the breeding season?



AGM 2012

Apologies to everyone who missed the last Agm. It was slightly different to the normal meeting format we have had in the past, in that it was held in the afternoon & evening. However, what a day we had!

Martin Hancock took up his new position as Chairman, starting the afternoon off, introducing Dr Simone Bullion who brought us up to date with dormice & otters. She explained the importance of record keeping, & appealed for more records this coming year, especially of hedgehogs & hares. Very often we see mammals in Suffolk, but how many of us actually record the sightings. It was the hunts that first noted that otters were in decline. Now they are illegal, it is down to our records to highlight any changes in populations early enough, to realise any possible influences that may have inadvertently been made to the environment.

Richard Woolnough reflected on his 30 years of being involved with badger conservation & was presented with a hand made, framed montage of mammals, along with a very cute bandaged toy badger! "A big thank you to everybody for my presents which are great – I took my badger to bed with me & I am now working out where to put my wonderful picture!! I thought it was a really good day & so much more enjoyable just being in the audience - well done Martin for your calm overseeing of the proceedings."



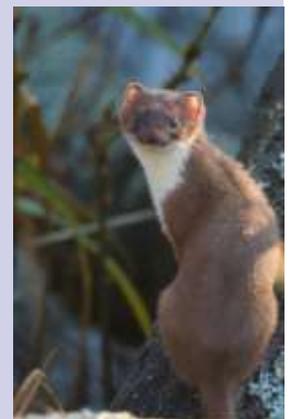
After the break Adam Rowlands (Senior Site Manager at RSPB Minsmere) gave a great insight into the Birds & Mammals at Minsmere and the interactions between them. The RSPB's slogan used to be "For Birds, For People, For Ever," but it is now "A million voices for nature."

Adam explained that during the 1940's, as a tank deterrent, a row of anti tank cubes were positioned on the coastal dunes and the area was flooded. At that time the area was heavily kept-ered against mammals & other predatory wildlife. Gibbet lines were common sight to prove to the landowner that the keeper was doing his job. In 1947 avocets bred on the flooded marshes, the RSPB started management, but keeping continued until they eventually acquired the freehold. Predator control had benefits but also problems. In the 1970s/80s Sandwich Terns deserted their broods after Fox predation, resulting in large amounts of fencing going up. However, recently Blackheaded Gulls are now eating the avocet, so should the area be opened back up to predators? The number of fences can give the area a zoo feel but the long term strategy is to get num-



Photo by "Sparky"

bers to a level, and the area of habitat big enough, to make the population sustainable even with the predators present. Mink decimated the tern's after they moved location after the fox disturbance, & now after a zero tolerance of mink its otters that will take their eggs. Otters are also being blamed for the dropping numbers of moorhen. Stoats have been photographed taking sand martin chicks & badgers have been recorded going out onto the scrape, along with foxes eating stone curlew eggs. Thankfully electric fencing is proving very



AGM 2012 (continued)

effective against this, but it's unnatural.

Adam continued that rabbits are great for stone curlews even if there are a few Minsmere 3 eared varieties! Habitat has been created for these (brash piles etc) which in turn is making the area more attractive to buzzards etc. The disease Myxomatosis wiped out many rabbits in the area, resulting in the loss of heathland & in turn numbers of wheatear & red backed shrike. Other interesting mammal related issues is the spread of the highly invasive plants. For example Piri piri burr seeds can be transported on the fur or wool of mammals.

In 2001 polish konik horses were bought to the reserve from a herd run by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust (SWT). These help to prevent expansion of scrubland & also help maintain the boundary between reed beds & open water areas, along with reed density. This has proved very successful for providing feeding pools for bitterns. Maintaining water levels for the birds makes for easy fishing but this in turn has been good for water vole. Bitterns will eat amphibians & fish, the more fish there are, attracts more otters.

Away from the reed beds, Minsmere also make use of larger mammals; highland cattle, Exmoor ponies and sheep, which are used to graze grassland & heath areas. Deer damage is proving to



be a problem & again fencing has had to be erected to protect areas. Muntjac have become quite a common sight & during times of food shortage they have become quite approachable, so much so that children have been reported riding them!!

Chinese water deer appear to have made it to Minsmere quite recently, while red deer, during the rutting period, are a large attraction for the reserve attracting more than 4000 people! Stone curlews are listed on schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which affords special protection at all times. Subsequent area closures to minimise disturbance to them, also then became a refuge to the deer. The proportion of deer can be good but too high numbers can influence the environment and also bird species such as the Nightjar.

AGM 2012 (continued)

Many Thanks to Adam for a fascinating talk, I for one hadn't really appreciated the vast interaction between Mammals & Birds, & so the RSPB's change in motto seems a very apt one. After our packed lunch, we were treated to an introduction into the world of bats by Arthur Rivett. He explained that the evening session would involve the group in carrying out a bat survey of Lackford lakes. We were played recordings of various species of bat, each with their distinctive sound pattern. As described below by Dennis & Anne Kell, we too were treated to a fantastic evening watching and listening to the wildlife, as the sun set. Arthur informed us that bats mate during the autumn,, but store their sperm & do not become pregnant until the spring. Bats usually give birth to a single baby, known as a "pup." Hopefully 2013 will be a better year for them.

NBMP - Field Survey Workshop (Suffolk Bat Group newsletter—Pipspeak)

(Lackford Lakes. 15.06.12)

Dennis & Anne Kell

Years ago, Anne & I met Arthur Rivett at a disused farmhouse near the SWT reserve at Lackford Lakes for the first part of our training to become licensed bat workers. Today, that disused building is a very smart private house & SWT has an equally impressive visitor centre on its reserve that was the venue for the Bat Conservation Trust workshop on the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) Field Survey (& also our 2012 AGM evening survey.)

Having never been involved in the survey, it was an ideal opportunity to find out more. Twelve people assembled and were ably led by Suffolk Bat Group (SBG) members, Bill Landells & Sue Hooton. It was straight into a presentation on the survey techniques, its purpose, the data gathered & how to get involved. National trends in the bat populations, based on the results from NBMP data were examined. From the start, we were involved in learning about bat call identification, helping to demystify the outputs from our bat detector.

After a short break for a snack, we moved out onto the reserve, putting our new-found skills into practice. Pipistrelles emerging from the old farmhouse were soon identified flying over a clearing. As was a mobile phone receiving texts! They also gave us the chance to practise counting passes, proving how valuable a counter can be in bat work.

On the woodland edge, we spent a little time learning to separate calls from the two pipistrelles and picked up a brief *Myotis* species as it passed. As darkness fell, we heard strong signals from noctules feeding by the lake and enjoyed very close encounters with more pipistrelles.

A dozen arms poking out from the shutters of a hide must have been an interesting view. Unfortunately, the expected daubentons were not around on the first lake visited so a winding trek through the reserve to the sailing lake followed. The large area of

surface vegetation was not ideal habitat but we did pick up a brief call and spotted one bat in Sue's lamp feeding on the water further out.

Returning to the centre, we were treated to a beautiful view of the International Space Station passing overhead. It had been an excellent evening; great fun, highly informative and very well-presented. Our thanks to all involved. Now, all we need to do is to sign up and put our new-found skills into practise.



Suffolk Badger Update

Adrian Hinchliffe



2012 has been another very eventful year, with some lows, but thankfully also some highs. The year started & ended with high profile badger crimes being committed. This year, as with the last, we will be lobbying against a looming badger cull.

With hare coursing incidents on the rise, one 62-year-old farmer from Hitcham, near Stowmarket, learned of the dangers of facing up to the type of people who enjoy these events, when he confronted the occupants of a spinning car, on his land. "Two gentlemen advanced towards me... he put me over the bonnet & I was thrown off.

They went past between two cars & they disappeared at a fantastic rate up the road... There's going to be a death because people are getting fed up & there's so much of it now; it's becoming a huge problem." Hare coursing is just one element of wildlife crime & it is particularly active at this time of year as crops have been harvested, making conditions ideal for this illegal activity. Those who take part, as well as those involved in badger baiting & other wildlife crime are often involved in other criminal activities. Whilst on farmland, they can be on the look out for farm machinery, diesel or other items & there is often a lot of money involved.

In a large step forward, Suffolk Police have recently announced the appointment of PC 328 Mark Bryant as Suffolk's dedicated wildlife crime officer. All non emergency wildlife calls made to the police (01473 613500) should now be asked to be directed to him & an incident number retained to enable us to follow up calls. Sett blocking, illegal snaring, shooting of badgers, as well as poisoning of wildlife all need to be reported.

I'd like to thank everyone who got actively involved in voicing concerns & disagreements at the governments decision to plough on with the badger cull. Thankfully this has been postponed but Owen Paterson insists the cull WILL go ahead in the summer & so we will have to continue to lobby against this. Having met, & personally knowing several people living in the proposed cull areas, seeing the impact its having first hand, makes one realize we cannot give up on the fight. There **are** alternatives other than pointing a gun. Badger Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, the Rspca, along with many other organizations are all opposed to the cull & will continue to press for vaccination, tighter biosecurity around farms & more stringent & better testing. Just recently a cow was reported as having passed 11 tests for bTB.

The Suffolk Badger & Other Mammals Group Aim to promote the conservation of Badgers and other mammals in Suffolk through recording their distribution, studying their ecology, raising awareness and providing advice.

Please continue to support our group and get involved in whatever way you can.

However, at slaughter it was found that the animal was riddled with disease! How many other animals had it infected? This years Badger Trust calendar was published in the autumn & to my pleasure one of the photo's of the Triplets that were rescued at Wormingford, made it to the front cover.

We have had four successful releases during 2012 which included three cubs. Many thanks to everyone who reports sightings, casualties & all those who assist in rescues & rehabilitation. Please keep those records coming in.

Planning can often conflict with badgers but if setts are located and flagged up in advance or at an early stage in the planning application, the badgers and their homes can often be mitigated for & any delays for the builders minimized. Please get in contact if you think a badger sett will be directly affected by any building work. Please don't assume we already know about it.

Have You Seen a Badger?

Please send in any Suffolk Badger casualty records, or sett reports to:
adrian@wondersofwildlife.co.uk

Badger Trust Conference Oct 2012 - New Forest

During October I took a trip down to the New Forest where Dave Williams, Chairman of the Badger Trust, opened the 2012 Badger Trust Conference, bringing us up to date with news on the cull. Unfortunately Brian May was unable to attend the conference, but Dave read out a letter of support. Brian was having a meeting with MPs later that month & had already been having discussions with Euro MPs too. He stated "You are not alone," "Team Badger" must fight for what is right.

Dave also spoke about the impending review of the "Law Commission Act" and its possible implications on the Protection of Badgers Act. A close eye would need to be kept on this, in case any relaxation was made to their protection status.

The Conference was well attended and very informative with just a selection represented here; Chris Packham gave an insight to his childhood and started by reminding us that one of the rarest mammals in the UK was the black rat, which would be very hard to study. Then there is the dormouse, very cute but probably the dullest! Sleeping 6 months of the year! And so, because Chris likes a challenge he decided to study a nocturnal animal - the badger! He read out extracts from his original badger diaries. At the age of 8 he would pitch his tent just feet from a sett and proceeded to shine his torch down the entrances, all through the night. Needless to say he saw nothing! Most of the entries read "nothing seen at all," "nothing seen," as it progressed it read "bugger all!" This continued until the age of 17 when he wrote "Badger Maga Day!"

He also recalled how for 5 years, every Thursday, he would analyze all the collected samples of badger poo, at the university, to see what they had been eating. He found that where there were plenty of conifers the impact would be detrimental to the soil & worms so is not good badger habitat. Worms were also in short supply on heathland again not great for badgers. Chris recalled in one 2 hour badger watching night he had to admit defeat after he was bitten by mosquito's 247 times (189 of them on his face!) He praised the work of Badger Trust for putting their head above the parapet and also the formation of "Team Badger" which comprised of a long list of animal welfare and conservation organizations opposed to a badger cull. He expressed the cull as "Divisive" 86% of the land in England is farmland, with just 1% held by conservationists. He believes the answer lies in the vaccination of cattle and we must motivate the nation to get this. He ended by saying that badgers will die, but public support will win in the end and the badger population will recover.



Ian Hutchinson was to give an update on Operation Meles (the project that records badger crime in the UK) but was unable to attend however he did supply figures from the past year:

Total no. of badger crimes 375; of which 292 were in England.

The crimes were split as follows:

Agricultural sett damage – 6, Baiting – 44, Sett Damage / Disturbance – 139, Hunt – 38, Killing – 70, Poison – 9, Shooting – 5, Snares/Traps – 41.

Most reports come from the RSPCA (210) then the Badger Trust (105), Scottish Badgers (50) and then the SSPCA (10).

Also mentioned was the fact we should still record all badger crime through local recorders into the Badger Trust data system despite the National Wildlife Crime Unit being told they can no longer collect the figures. In Ireland 6 people had 204 charges of badger crime brought against them!

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The recently publicized case in Howsham, North Yorkshire, involved 6 men, a teenager, 13 dogs & ended with 2 badgers & a sow with 3 foetuses being killed. Papers could not publish the images. Digging for badgers tends to start in Feb & March when sows are at their most protective of their cubs.



Unfortunately guest speakers from the Food & Environment Research Agency (FERA) were going to give updates on the aims & progress of the “National Badger Survey of England & Wales” & its possible “Role as a reservoir in bTB.” However, they had been told not to attend the conference! Despite this we were informed that the last National survey was done in 1997. Although not founded in statistics the survey showed badger densities around the regions. This latest survey would be carried out the same as the previous 2 using 1 km squares (1700 of them) they would record the number of main setts during the winter & by the spring of 2013 it would be completed & published in the summer of 2013. Hair samples would be taken in proposed cull areas.

FERA were also unfortunately unable to personally update us on the extremely important issue of the development in badger vaccines with over 2,000 badgers having been vaccinated. Experiments with an oral vaccine concealed in bait continues with a £15m budget set aside for the next 4 years. £43m has already been spent since 1974 on cattle & badger vaccine research .

A RSPCA officer from the special ops unit informed us about a recent case they had been investigating. In May 2010 after obtaining a search warrant they entered a property & found kennels containing “bull lurchers” (used for bringing down large prey), digging & lamping gear, vet kits, lamps, locators & collars, 2 freezers containing x2 erythristic badgers, & a .22 rimfire rifle in the shed (unsecured) along with 137 rounds of “dum dum” illegal rounds. The owner had no license & was arrested on site. A Sony camera was seized & proved key in part of the case. 6 days after the warrant the dogs were stolen back from the RSPCA boarding kennels! They were never relocated.

We were shown some of the horrific video which some people felt unable to watch. 14 badgers were killed over a 3 month period between 11pm and 2 am & one of the defendants was heard to be distinctively laughing whilst filming. Other victims were deer & foxes. After a search of another defendants property 3 lurchers & 3 terriers were found. They were shown to have the most appalling injuries. One “prize dog” had no jaw, no teeth & part of its nose was missing!!! Thankfully these dogs were treated & rehomed.



During interview one defendant laughed & this was matched to the video, voice analysis was carried out on the video & mobile phone images were matched. Forensics, vets & expert examinations were all undertaken over the two year time limit & eventually the defendant was convicted on 9 charges & sentenced to 24 weeks in prison (he served 10!) & banned for keeping dogs for life. The other got 2 years for being in possession of firearms & ammunition. The total cost of the investigation was £25,000.

Graham Roberts from Hampshire Wildlife Trust gave an interesting talk on the otter's success & the problems that now arise. He explained that in 1976 otters were extremely rare, their staple diet was eels, now however, it seems to be pike, bullheads & other fish. They have also been reported to kill

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swans and water vole. Other predators such as heron & cormorant have licenses granted for culling at fisheries so how long will it be before this applies to the otter?

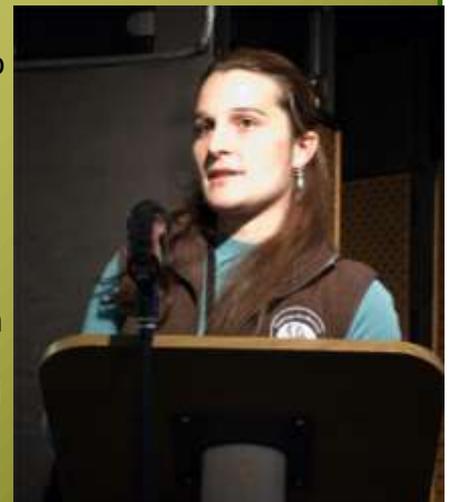
In Hampshire they get day & night otter sightings. You can age an otter through their teeth by counting cementum lines (caused by seasonal changes in diet), generally they live to be 8-9 (the oldest at Bungay Otter Trust was 16yrs.) Roads, rail & housing (causing fragmentation of territories) are major influences on otter population. The Hunts are still active & use otter hounds in Sussex, but hunt "rats." The otters prefer to take up residence in hollow Ash, Oak & Sycamore trees, along with natural rock fall. In Cornwall otters tend to be spotted on the coast more during the winter months, when there is less human disturbance.



Aiding the recovery of otters is attributed to plenty of breeding sites, better agricultural practices, food availability (increase in fish farms, some with rivers running through & no defenses!) &

better water quality. Otters can sense old fashioned stew ponds, when their discharges enter rivers. If an otter gets in but not out, it may only eat 1kg of fish but the fish get stressed, use up all the oxygen & then suffocate. Winter time is more problematic as the fish are more lethargic. Foxes & mink will also take fish. Fencing with gaps larger than 4inch will allow access to an otter. Sheep or rabbit netting with electrification is better.

On the Sunday, Virginie Boyaval, gave a heart warming insight into her work with badgers on the continent. After finding a wounded badger eight years ago & taking care of it, she found her passion for badgers grew & started the Meles association. She began to study 10 groups within the forest of Compiègne in France & filmed their behaviour. France do not protect their badgers, in fact from 15th May to 15th Jan they hold badger digging days. Virginie has filmed these barbaric acts & the films are truly emotive. Armed with her films she travels Europe to try and change the opinion of the hunters & farmers. If ever you get a chance to see her film "Honani - the spirit of the badger" I recommend it. It's a badgers eye level film with some fantastic footage.



Joe Duckworth from the League Against Cruel Sports told us about an operation that had taken place the previous night. A dairy farmer in North Wales (dissatisfied with the vaccination programme) had hired a team of heavies from South Wales to exterminate badgers on his land. Luckily they were apprehended along with their tools. He spoke about the increase in crime, much of it unreported & unrecorded, including fox hunting, hare coursing, sett disturbance & the international trade in dogs like bull lurchers. He made reference to the broken window syndrome, once one gets broken people think its fine to smash the rest.

Hedgehogs

Have you seen a hedgehog? Having spotted my first hedgehog (unfortunately dead) on 16th February 2012 (5th Feb this year) & my last one busily feeding on a mild 27th November evening, I wandered what effect the milder winters are having on them. Is it upsetting their hibernation or is it a benefit having mild spells to boost their fat reserves? Is rehabilitating underweight hedgehogs introducing a weak gene or helping a dwindling population? We need to record our observations so do please keep the records coming in - Dead or Alive!

Polecats on the move?

On the morning of 26th July 2012 I headed out of Sudbury & headed into Essex. I seem to be tuned-in to spotting black & white animals laying at the side of the road, but on this occasion this one was much smaller. Was it a ferret, mink or was it a polecat? After turning my vehicle around twice & seeing that the corpse was still intact, I retrieved the animal & took several photographs of it. Later in the year Dr Johnny Birks of the "Mammal society" confirmed "This does look very much like a polecat, with no obvious signs of ferret in its pelage." I had previously seen mammal road casualties that I have thought look like polecats, but they have been too damaged to retrieve. However on 15th November at 0230 whilst returning from work I saw very close to the Suffolk border at Ballingdon Hill, what looked very much like a live polecat! I shone my vehicle lights on it as best I could but the animal was on the road verge & then ran off into a copse. Was it foraging or looking for road kill?

Later that month I received an email with the rare description of badgers foraging on road kill. "My husband was travelling along the Halesworth Road, Reydon (A1095) when he saw a badger in the road apparently enjoying some road kill (dead muntjac). As Kev slowly drove past the badger scuttled off into the field. Kev turned around further down the road to see if he could see it again. When he drove back along the road he saw a badger on the opposite side of the road to the first sighting & it appeared to be moving along the opposite field with some purpose, away from the dead muntjac. Again he turned the car around to go past a third time. On this occasion he saw a badger back on the road near the muntjac. Kev cannot rule out the possibility that it was the same badger, but from the activities seen he believes that he saw 2 badgers." This account is quite fascinating & really appreciated. If you see anything that resembles a polecat or a badger then please do let me know via my email with as much detail as possible including date & grid reference or postcode.

Subtle differences between a polecat and a ferret are; A polecat has dark fur on its face that extends right down onto its nose, a ferret's stops short. A polecat has pale cheek patches and possible frontal band that contrasts with its dark facial mask. They have no pale throat patch (or its less than 50mm long), and they have no scattered white guard hairs over their body, whereas a ferret can have them all over especially on its hindquarters and tail. Ferrets also have one or more white paws.



Trial to test the

“Humaneness of shooting free running Badgers”

On 23rd October, Environment Secretary Owen Paterson announced that the Badger cull would be postponed, but requested that the pilot badger culls in West Somerset and West Gloucestershire go ahead in 2013 “Despite a greatly increased effort over the last few days & weeks, the farmers delivering this policy have concluded that they cannot be confident that it will be possible to remove enough badgers...” As part of the conditions of the Cull, a kill rate of 70% must be confirmed. If this isn’t achieved then there would need to be enough money paid up-front from the farmers, to fund a third party to step in and achieve it for the four year period. Also blamed was the exceptionally bad weather, protracted legal proceedings and requests from the police to delay the start until after the Olympics, for being the reasons for not going ahead. “ I remain fully committed to working with the farming industry to ensure that the pilot culls can be delivered effectively, safely and humanely next summer”

Future Bovine TB Strategies

In the Autumn the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England (AHWBE) held an informal stakeholder engagement to air views on future bTB strategy, & how best to meet future challenges. They collected written submissions, held regional workshops & held an online survey hosted by Farmers Weekly. The breakdown of respondents by sector or profession is:

Farmers, farming organisations and related bodies: 36%

Vets (veterinarians, veterinary practices and veterinary professional bodies): 22%

Wildlife and conservation groups: **2%**, Trading Standards and inspectors: 1%

Others including commercial companies and members of the public: 39%

The aim is to establish greater dialogue & collaborative working between Government, the livestock industry & the Veterinary profession on bTB.

Some of the points raised & discussed:

Farmers & Vets were asked “What measures do you want to see in place, to crack down on practices that risk spreading bTB?” Their suggestions were that trading & movement controls should be strengthened in certain areas, including ensuring that all cattle movements are recorded. Farm-to-farm sales through auction marts should be reduced, extra checks made of movement records with high fines imposed for non-compliance in high-risk areas, tighter control of movements between high & low risk areas, no linked holdings in high risk areas, and a reduction made in the time allowed for moving cattle after a pre movement test (PrMT) to 30 days.

Other responses said that the accuracy & consistency of testing need to be improved & the issue of camelids, outdoor pigs & sheep should be taken more seriously. Incentives & penalties should be used, including heavy penalties for ‘flouting rules’ & better compensation values for those with excellent biosecurity. The disposal of TB-infected milk should also be given greater consideration, including stopping the disposal into slurry tanks & feeding “waste” milk to calves.

From the Farmers Weekly survey many expressed support for cattle & badger vaccination, & were opposed to badger culling. Suggestions for tightening controls also included improving biosecurity & reducing intensification of farming.

Future Bovine TB Strategies

Prevention:

Many farmer & veterinary responses covered wildlife control, including calls to lift the Badger Protection Act, with legal safeguards against badger baiting provided by the Wildlife Countryside Act. Also farmers want a license to deal with wildlife control locally, to allow the use of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to identify infected setts, look at using oral contraceptive in wildlife, & for industry-funded badger vaccination in low incidence areas. There were several calls to re-introduce the 'clean ring' badger culling policy around new bTB outbreaks, & to bring back the national road kill badger post-mortem survey, which would help assess the extent of TB in wildlife. More involvement of wildlife groups should be sought in discussions about wider TB issues to create a shared understanding of the problem.

Other ideas put forward to prevent bTB were to reduce the amount of maize grown (a forage crop attractive to badgers) by paying farmers to stop growing it for a set period of 3-5 years & to raise awareness of how cattle nutrition, particularly mineral & trace element deficiency, can potentially affect disease susceptibility. Some called for mandatory whole herd slaughter in low incidence areas to clear infection quicker & reduce the time period of undetected infection, while some pointed out that for some farmers, this would threaten the viability of their business.

There were several calls for a reduced testing regime for farms with high, assessable biosecurity standards 'in return for' reduced or zero compensation for reactor animals. Other ideas included compulsory camelid testing & movement rules, plus increased sheep/goat testing particularly for large flocks/herds, & to test & cull infected deer. On the subject of camelids it was asked "could camelids be as big a bTB reservoir as badgers?" The answer being "There are fewer risks in terms of camelid-to-cattle infection; however there are risks of more infection camelid-to-camelid. More testing & research is being carried out. Camelids & the disease transmission risks posed are high on the Animal Health & Veterinary Laboratories Agencies (AHVLA) agenda. The alpaca industry recognises that it needs to be registered similar to livestock, but there are cost implications. The blood test is supported by the alpaca associations but has too many false positives." Government would disagree with this view.

Vaccination:

Expanding on the issue of vaccination a question was asked "Bluetongue & SBV vaccines are available on the market, why aren't bTB vaccines commercially explored/available & why is it taking so long?" The answer was "commercial providers are reluctant to put money into developing a vaccine due to the EU legal position, i.e. it would pose too much of a risk that any developed vaccine would be able to be legally deployed in this country."

There were many responses urging for more funding, faster progress on cattle vaccine development & more investigations to look at other ways round the EU legal issue such as introducing a register of vaccinated herds & only permitting trade between these herds.

The Mammal Society believes the best hope for reducing bovine TB lies in badger & even cattle vaccination. Marina Pacheco added: "Shooting badgers is not a magic bullet for preventing TB transmission, & it will also be a divisive issue within rural communities. A vaccination programme, if proven effective, offers considerable potential & a much more publicly-acceptable way of tackling this issue."

Although controversial, Suffolk has played an important part in the vaccination study in badgers. Licenses were issued by Natural England & the Home Office in August 2006 enabling the

Future Bovine TB Strategies

Vaccination (continued):

Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) to test the efficacy of Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine in Badgers. Badgers were sourced by staff at FERA & it was decided to remove them from Suffolk, since the county has no history of bTB in badgers (& only very little in cattle). The badger density is sufficiently high that badgers could be removed with only minimum disturbance to the remaining populations. Police & DEFRA security advisors met with FERA & the VLA to plan the operation.

As a result the injectable vaccine report has been published, but the oral vaccine “will not be released at this time as it contains commercially sensitive information”

The badgers were microchipped, tattooed & then moved to their new “homes” 5-6 weeks before the challenge. They were then vaccinated: One group of badgers were given a high dose (x10 dose normally prescribed to humans) another group were given the normal dose given to humans & the third were not vaccinated. 17 weeks post vaccination all the badgers were then given an intrabronchial installation of approximately 1ml of M. bovis suspension (substantially higher than that encountered in natural exposure). After 12 weeks the experiment was terminated & the badgers were humanely killed by an intravenous overdose. They were then given post mortems.

In each vaccinated case the “disease was mainly found in the organs of the thoracic cavity with limited dissemination elsewhere. Protection was seen in that there was a significant reduction in visible lesions & there was a reduction in bacterial excretion. The onset of TB was significantly delayed in the high dose group. Vaccination did not prevent infection, most likely because of the overwhelming size of the challenge dose. **It is possible that in settings of natural infection, BCG vaccination may fare better than in the experimental studies & may even provide complete or adequate protection, either individually or through a herd immunity effect.**

Protection was found to be dependant on BCG dose. The human dosage offered less protection than the x10 dose. As injectable BCG is both protective & safe for badgers, & is feasible to be given to restrained conscious animals, then field vaccination is feasible for the first time; representing a new intervention tool for the control of bovine TB in badgers. It was granted marketing authorisation on 24th March 2010.

In Wales, the Environment Minister John Griffiths announced last March that they would be vaccinating badgers instead of culling so as to “move very swiftly...Our decision to pursue a vaccination programme has enabled us to take quick & decisive action aimed at developing a degree of immunity to TB within the badger population. We believe that this will reduce the risk of TB transmission from badgers to cattle.”

Bovine TB & Red Tape

Researchers led by Professor Glyn Hewinson, of Animal Health & the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in Weybridge, Surrey, have developed a so-called "Diva" test – meaning differentiation of infected animals from vaccinated animals. This makes the distinction between the two clear. Such a test, if used in conjunction with a new cattle TB vaccine being developed simultaneously, would enable the Government to ask the EU for the law to be changed, so cattle could indeed be immunised against the disease. However, both the vaccine and the test have to be validated by regulatory agencies, a long & complex process which "may take years", according to the Government's Chief Veterinary Officer, Nigel Gibbens.

Bovine TB & Red Tape (continued)

So what is the current situation? DEFRA secretary Owen Paterson told a meeting of the Conservative Rural Affairs Group, in Birmingham that, as things stand today, vaccines are 'not yet in a position to be deployed' in either cattle or badgers. And so "We cannot be knocked off course by a few extremists." He added BCG was available for cattle but was 'only 56-68 per cent effective', meaning at least one-third of animals would remain unprotected.



But what is the actual risk to public health? In an article by Paul & David Torgerson named "Public health & bTB. Whats all the fuss about?" the authors propose that the continuing bTB programme in the UK is economically unacceptable as a public health intervention. They suggest data is lacking with regard to the positive economic effects to animal health, given that the main costs are implementation expenditure. They also suggest that the most effective way of reducing the economic impact of bTB, is to stop the bTB control programme in its present form. Thus shifting away from prevention in cattle, but continuing with the regulation of milk & meat. This

should provide adequate public health protection at relatively modest costs.

Mr Paterson confirmed "We know what the solution is & I can assure you there will be two pilot culls starting in June. We simply have to prove this method of culling works, & roll it out the following year, because we cannot allow this disease to run rampant & destroy our cattle industry."

A badger cull could, according to the Independent Scientific Group's (ISG) final report, reduce the increase in the incidence (not the overall amount of btb) by 16% over 9 years. This is what's called a relative reduction, not an absolute reduction. But scientists involved in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) & the ISG do not believe that the current proposed method of culling can achieve this. In fact they believe it could make the situation worse.

With the loss of badgers, numbers of foxes will inevitably increase, having a knock on effect perhaps on dwindling hare populations. But if Mr Cameron gets his way & fox hunting were brought back in.....!

Pine marten found in Wales after 40 year absence.

On 8th November, a dead pine marten was found in Newtown, Powys. This is the first carcass reported in Wales since 1971. DNA analysis carried out at the Waterford Institute of Technology in the Republic of Ireland, confirmed that the animal was a young male pine marten native to the British Isles. Up until this latest discovery, the most recent unequivocal evidence was a dropping, positively DNA tested, & found in Cwm Rheidol forest, in 2007. The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) has said pine marten numbers had grown in Scotland in recent years, but they had not recovered in Wales & England. It plans to carry out a two year study in wales to determine the pine martens status & help develop a long term conservation plan.

Geoffrey Soar

Earlier in 2012, we learned that Geoffrey Soar sadly passed away. He was a long standing member of the Suffolk Badger Group and was also one of the key volunteers on the harvest mouse project, analysing lots of barn owl pellets to check for harvest mouse skulls. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to his wife Eleanor.

Infra red camera technology :

Closing Badger Setts during the breeding season.

The use of remote camera's are proving very successful in determining the cause of disturbance, monitoring the rehab of casualties & even just seeing what is visiting an area. A report by P J. McDonald & T P. Allen further indicates their use. During electricity substation upgrading works at a site here in Suffolk, five badger setts were closed (under licence) in 2009 as they were directly under the footprint of the works.

In 2011, a three-entrance, outlier sett was found. The scope of the works meant that closure was unavoidable as even if the structure were able to be relocated the sett would still remain within the substations electrified fencing, which would pose a risk both to badgers and site operations. The closure needed to be completed by March 2011 which meant closing the sett in the breeding season. Natural England are minded to refuse licence applications to close setts due to the welfare considerations of any young which may be present. It was therefore proposed upon agreement with Natural England, that intensive monitoring over a 2-week period would be sufficient to assess if badgers were using the sett. If absence was proven beyond reasonable doubt, then this would enable the sett to be destroyed without the need for a licence. Previous extensive monitoring showed that badgers were unlikely to be present. However, a monitoring program was required to ensure that this was the case by a suitably qualified ecologist with thorough knowledge of badger ecology.

The next question was would manual checks by an ecologist every 2-3 days be used or would use of a remote camera be practicable? An ecologist would incur higher labour & transport costs, whilst heavy rainfall could obscure field signs. Also field signs could indicate a badger just walking past & not actually entering a sett. The downsides of the camera were that it could be stolen, the camera angle could be too narrow; resulting in further outlay for more camera's, the camera's sensitivity & the time to process the photographs. On consideration of these advantages & disadvantages, the remote camera option was selected.



A remote 'trail' camera with an infra-red flash was set up approximately 50 cm in height & 5 m from the sett entrances. It was concealed with cut vegetation (as the area is occasionally accessed by the public) & left for 2 weeks. The camera was set to take bursts of 3 photographs each time it was triggered, set at 'medium sensitivity', with a delay time between photographs of 30 seconds. The camera was programmed to take photographs between peak badger activity times above ground.

The camera was triggered six times, taking a total of 18 photographs. One image of a badger was taken on 22 February at 01.30 h. It was not recorded again & most likely it was passing by whilst foraging; it did not emerge from the sett nor return to it. The other images did not show any mammal evidence & it is suspected that the camera may have been triggered by a piece of vegetation in front of the camera moving in the wind. When it was established that there was no badger activity in the sett, it was destroyed by digging the three tunnels back using a mechanical ex-

Infra red camera technology :

Closing Badger Setts during the breeding season.

cavator with an ecologist present to observe any signs of badgers (or other mammals); none were present. The excavated spoil was then replaced and compacted to discourage any new digging.

This has proved to be a cost effective method for monitoring badger activity around the sett entrance and could be applied to other similar situations but it is worth bearing in mind that installation of camera's can potentially affect mammal activity for several days, especially where the site is not normally subject to human disturbance, or if targeting species particularly sensitive to infra-red light such as the otter.

This novel, non-invasive monitoring technique was done in liaison with the governmental statutory body, Natural England, but without the need for a licence. Remote monitoring techniques like this could be applied in similar situations where work is required during the badger breeding season (December to June) when licences are not normally issued.

All photographs in this newsletter were taken by A Hinchliffe unless otherwise stated.

British Bees in Decline!

Three species of bees are already extinct and others are in rapid decline. Many factors are causing the bees' decline - from habitat loss, to disease, to climate change. There is also growing evidence that some pesticides harm bees, others blame an increase in badger numbers. If you find a dug out bees nest we would be very interested in recording its location. Many wasp nests are found dug out during the autumn but I for one have probably only found 3 bee's nests. Bees are essential to our food supply, economy and quality of life: they pollinate 75% of our most vital crops and favourite foods. The finger of suspicion is being pointed at certain best-selling neonicotinoid pesticides, widely used in seed-dressing, soil treatment & for spraying. The requirement, it seems, is to stop the bees coming into contact with the neonicotinoids. A ban on their use on crops such as rape, sunflower & maize or a restriction on their use when the plants are in flower seems likely. They "should only be used on crops not attractive to honeybees," says the European Food Safety Authority. The evidence is not conclusive but it is starting to look damning. It appears they are not necessarily lethal to bees but that they are weakening the bees' resistance to disease and reducing their rate of reproductivity.

Without bees it would cost UK farmers millions to pollinate crops & without them in our gardens, parks and countryside, other insects, birds and animals would all suffer.



As with hedgehog numbers declining, & there being suggestive comments of it being attributed to the badger, it is important that we provide evidence to back up any claims regarding badgers & bee's, and badgers & hedgehogs. Please let us know of any hedgehogs, dead or alive, & especially empty hedgehog skins found away from roads.

Have your say: Please send any interesting story / comment / picture, with reference to a mammal, in to me & they may well appear in the next edition of the newsletter.

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