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Emma Penny, Editor



Saturday, 24 August 2013

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Top scientist resigns over Welsh badger cull U-turn

27 April 2012 | By Barry Alston

ONE of the UK's leading research scientists and a member of the management board set up to oversee the eradication of bovine TB in Wales has resigned in protest over the Welsh Government's change of direction.

Professor Chris Pollock, who after retiring as director of the world famous Aberystwyth-based Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences was appointed acting Chief Scientist in Wales, has told Farmers Guardian that he believes the decision by Environment Minister, John Griffiths, to opt for badger vaccination rather than culling is flawed.

“There are two reasons why I felt I could no longer be a member of the programme management board,” he said today (Friday, April 27).

“Vaccination is effectively untried so you are exchanging an approach which has a track record of success in Ireland and elsewhere with one not really tried at all,” he says.

“That was a position I was far from happy with but more significantly from my standpoint was that in the scientific report



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the Minister commissioned there was a specific comment about the problems of using vaccination in an area where you obviously had a high incidence of disease.

“Using vaccination in the targeted Intensive Action Area, where the level of infection in badgers is extremely high, in my view goes against the recommendations of his own scientific review.

“I was certainly not happy about that and as such did not believe I could continue to be a member of the programme board if I did not fully support the programme being pursued.

“Bovine TB is a very difficult disease to eradicate and there is no straightforward answer, indeed, if there was we would not have the problems we have.

“It needs concerted action on all fronts and I believe the policy of the previous coalition Welsh Assembly Government did have a reasonable chance of gaining some real progress.

“But I believe the chances of making progress have been reduced as a result of the changes being pursued by the current administration.

“If you vaccinate an animal, or even a human, that already has the disease it has not affect whatsoever,” says Professor Pollock.

“Vaccinated infected badgers can live for several years and continue to spread the disease. It does not stop them being carriers and as such I am not convinced this is a change for the better.

The only response from the Welsh Government has been an



acknowledgement of Professor Pollock's resignation.

Readers' comments (8)

mike | 27 April 2012 10:15 am

The Welsh Government is there to look after the interests of the Welsh People. They are not there to frustrate enterprising people by putting the interests of badgers first. Utter foolishness.

Unsuitable or offensive? Report this comment

Celia Thomas | 27 April 2012 12:26 pm

I am surprised that someone who is so obviously concerned about the science of the matter should make the mistake of perpetuating the myth that badgers here in North Pembrokeshire are heavily infected. No survey has been carried out to prove this and the found dead survey indicated only 3 infected badgers in the IAA. There are so many others issues that need to be addressed to reduce the spread of bTB it is a shame badgers are still so often viewed as the only problem, another myth!

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Anonymous | 27 April 2012 12:59 pm

The Peasant
How come Celia Thomas | 27 April 2012 12:26 pm, that you know so much more about this subject than Professor Chris Pollock acting Chief Scientist in Wales? Or could it be that your view is somewhat biased?

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The Newt | 27 April 2012 1:04 pm

Bravo Professor Pollock; you are clearly a man of great integrity.

Well done sir we salute you!

At last the truth is coming out!

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Anonymous | 27 April 2012 1:31 pm

Well done Pollock.

Celia Thomas, do you really think that all the infected badgers died in 2006 and were subsequently picked up by the found dead survey? Is so you have no right to criticise my eight year old daughter's grasp of statistics, let alone Pollock's. Those badgers picked up gave us the only indication we have of the proportion infected, which is in the region of 15%. The number of cattle infected is a fraction of 1%. Ex ISG member Christl Donnelly estimates in evidence given to the Welsh Government that 50% of cattle infection in the English RBCT areas came from badgers, and the fact that routine cattle controls work in Scotland but not north Pembrokeshire tells us clearly that, unlike Scotland, we have a major disease reservoir in the area likely to be of the same order as in the RBCT areas.

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Anonymous | 27 April 2012 1:36 pm

Celia.

The Badger Found Dead survey found that:

The prevalence of *M. bovis* infection in badgers was highest in areas of high cattle prevalence and lowest in areas of low cattle prevalence.

So where a lot of cattle have it a lot of badgers will have it as well.

Science 101 by chive.

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Evan Owen | 27 April 2012 2:56 pm

I admire Professor Pollock for expressing his expert opinion, unfortunately it would appear that the Welsh Government does not have the courage to take on the minority of the population who have a pink and fluffy view of the badger and have the money to challenge our elected executive in court.

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Charles Henry | 28 April 2012 2:20 pm

(part) Memorandum submitted by Former Veterinary Officers, State Veterinary Service.

Dr John Gallagher, a veterinary pathologist since 1972

THE NATURE OF TB IN BADGERS

1. Tuberculosis has a different manifestation in most species . In the badger it is fundamentally different from TB in cattle essentially due to the lack of development of a hypersensitivity response which is a prime feature of infection in cattle. Thus small numbers of organisms infecting cattle produce a vigorous cellular response which results in extensive cell death and the development of large cold abscesses in the affected tissues usually the lung and respiratory lymph nodes . This is in fact the host immune reaction to TB. Whilst causing disease and disruption to the affected organs the changes inside these abscesses strongly inhibit the TB bacteria and kill many of them.

The badger does not show such a vigorous destructive reaction but rather a slowly progressive proliferative reaction which eventually results in cell death as numbers of bacteria increase markedly. TB lesions are thus relatively much smaller but contain relatively vastly more bacteria than those of cattle. TB bacteria do not produce toxins but

rather cause lesions as a result of their highly antigenic cell walls to which different hosts may respond with greater or lesser aggression.

PROGRESSION OF INFECTION

2. Once a badger develops disease all the members of that social group are likely to become infected due to the confined living space in their underground tunnel systems, their highly gregarious nature and constant mutual grooming. But that seed of infection (the primary focus) will usually only progress to produce disease and eventually death in a minority of cases. Latency is a feature of TB in many species and this is so in badgers and cattle. The bulk of infections in badgers, usually 70% or more will become latent or dormant. A small number of badgers may resolve the infection completely and self cure. But the latent infections remain fully viable and may breakdown under stress which may be of nutritional origin, intercurrent disease, senile deterioration or social disturbance and disruption. Some badgers may develop fulminating disease (Gallagher et al 1998).

Badgers with terminal generalised tuberculosis can excrete vast numbers of bacteria particularly when the kidneys are infected. Counts of several million bacteria in a full urination have been recorded (Gallagher and Clifton-Hadley, 2000).

When infection is acquired by a bite wound from the contaminated mouth of another badger, the bacteria are inoculated either deeply subcutaneously or intramuscularly and rapid generalisation of infection usually occurs, causing progression to severe and often fatal tuberculosis which may develop in a matter of several months (Gallagher and Nelson, 1979). Respiratory origin infections have a longer duration and cases in an endemically infected population (Woodchester) have been monitored showing intermittent excretion of infection for a year, with the longest recorded case excreting for almost three years before death.

The above ground mortality due to TB is estimated as about 2% of the population per annum. Thus in the South West alone with its now extensive endemically infected areas the annual deaths due to TB will be of the order of at least

1000 to 2000.

Tuberculosis has an unfettered progress in the badger population and the cycle of infection and disease in the badger has long been known to be self sustaining (Zuckerman 1980). Over time the badger has become well adapted as a primary reservoir host of bovine TB infection.

More from the report:

<http://www.bovinetb.info/docs/Gallagher.pdf>

I'm sorry to say, the longer this goes on, the closer the day comes when farmers just do the job anyway. . It's probably started already in Wales.

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