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Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 March 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Badgers/Bovine TB

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost of the road traffic accident badger survey has been from its inception to date. [158335]

Mr. Bradshaw: The total cost of the road traffic accident badger survey to date is £218,000.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research is being undertaken on badger to cattle transmission of *M. bovis* via cattle feed troughs. [158337]

Mr. Bradshaw: Research by the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) has shown that in the Woodchester Park study area some badgers regularly obtained feed from cattle troughs. In addition, badgers have been recorded defecating and urinating in troughs. Ongoing research at CSL aims to identify the seasonal and frequency of trough-use by badgers on cattle farms throughout the south-west of England. The results of this research will be reported to Defra in December 2005.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the responses are of badger groups confronted with shortages of primary foods arising from population pressure in terms of (a) selectivity of diet and (b) foraging distance. [158338]

Mr. Bradshaw: The primary food of the badger in Britain is the earthworm. These do not represent a limiting resource across much of Britain, especially the south-west, due to their super-abundance. However, they may not be available to badgers under some conditions such as during periods of dry weather. Therefore, badgers are unlikely to be confronted with food shortages as a result of increasing population size alone. When earthworms are not available badgers are forced to select other food sources and will forage greater distances to obtain these. Being generalist opportunists, badgers will consume a wide variety of foods. These include many invertebrates, plant roots, fruits, cereals, animal carcasses and stored livestock feed. Food shortages may encourage badgers to forage at greater distances from their setts, although there is no quantitative data on this.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether badger carcasses on the roadside reported by members of the public are included in the road traffic accident badger survey. [158625]

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Mr. Bradshaw: The Road Traffic Accident (RTA) survey only operates in the seven English counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hereford, Gloucestershire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. Defra staff endeavour to collect any badgers reported by members of the public from roadsides within those counties. Not all badgers collected are suitable for post mortem examination, and only those that are suitable can provide data for the survey.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff are employed in the collection of badgers killed in road traffic accidents; and what the average period is between a report of a carcass being received and a collection being made. [158627]

Mr. Bradshaw: The road traffic accident survey (RTA) of badgers killed by motor vehicles in seven English counties was operated by the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) from June 2002 to end of February 2004. CSL had two full-time staff involved in the collection of RTA badgers (in peak periods another member of staff assisted), and typically a carcass would be collected within 24 hours of being reported.

Defra's Wildlife Unit (WLU) is now operating the RTA survey, and intends to involve up to four staff daily, as necessary, in the task of collecting carcasses. All other travelling WLU staff, however, may also collect such carcasses, as an ancillary action to their primary work tasks. The WLU will aim to collect such carcasses within

one working day of their notification.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of bovine TB control programmes undertaken without the active co-operation of farmers. [157939]

Mr. Bradshaw: No such assessment has been made, but the co-operation of farmers is vital for a TB control programme in cattle to be effective.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of other causes to which the reduction in bovine TB could be attributed in the Thornbury experiment, other than the clearance of badgers. [157949]

Mr. Bradshaw: The fundamental difference between the Thornbury area and other areas in south west England, where bovine tuberculosis was a problem, was the systematic removal badgers from the Thornbury area. No other species was similarly removed. No other contemporaneous change was identified that could have accounted for the reduction in TB incidence within the area.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her assessment is of the effect of anti-trial activity on the success rate of badger trapping during the Krebs trials. [157954]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not possible to assess accurately the effect of anti-trial activity on the success of badger trapping, as there are no control data with which to draw a comparison. However, it is likely that such

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activity has had a negative impact on the success rate, and has certainly led to some trapping operations being prematurely suspended or extended.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the number of injuries to (a) cattle owners, (b) keepers and (c) stockmen which will be sustained as a result of the enhanced testing programme. [157958]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Health and Safety Executive do not hold specific data on the number of accidents occurring on farms that can be directly attributed to the current TB testing programme. Therefore it would not be possible to estimate the number of injuries resultant of any changes to the TB testing programme.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the prevalence of TB in cattle is higher on organic holdings than on those where cattle are housed intensively. [158021]

Mr. Bradshaw: The TB99 epidemiological questionnaire has been designed to assess factors that might predispose herds to a TB breakdown, and their relative importance. The form includes questions on organic herd status. To date, no finalised analyses have been made, but analyses of pre-Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak data and of data collected in 2002 are in progress. The results will be published later this year.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in (a) Scotland and (b) Wales on the control of bovine TB; and what the outcome was of those consultations. [158330]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are regular discussions at official level on bovine TB issues. A subject of recent discussions has been the consultation exercise "Preparing for a new GB strategy on bovine tuberculosis".

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she has collated on whether poor standards of animal health and welfare in cattle husbandry contribute to the increases in bovine TB in cattle. [158331]

Mr. Bradshaw: An Independent Husbandry Panel was set up by MAFF on 17 January 2000, in response to a recommendation of the Agriculture Select Committee (in April 1999) for a working party to be established to review the available scientific evidence on husbandry, and the role it might play in controlling bovine TB. Factors considered by the Panel included health and welfare aspects such as physiological state and concurrent diseases. Its report was published by MAFF in 2000.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what resources devoted to the Krebs reactive trials have been transferred to the Krebs proactive trials. [158333]

Mr. Bradshaw: Wildlife unit staff and equipment have always been deployed on all elements of the culling trial; no particular element is ring-fenced and resources will therefore not specifically be re-directed to proactive culling following the cessation of the reactive culling work.

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Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what adverse effects have been observed in cattle subject to continuous 60-day TB testing; and whether this has been accompanied by a higher rate of (a) abortion, (b) premature calving and (c) early embryonic loss. [158499]

Mr. Bradshaw: No adverse effects have been observed in cattle subjected to 60-day (short-interval) tuberculin testing.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what consultations she has had with (a) local authorities and (b) their representative bodies on the resource implications arising from the enforcement of the proposed Tuberculosis (England) Order; [158501]

(2) what estimate she has made of the costs to local authorities of enforcing the proposed Tuberculosis (England) Order 2004 in the first five years of its application. [158573]

Mr. Bradshaw: Consideration of the costs to local government will be considered fully in the final Regulatory Impact Assessment for the proposed new Tuberculosis (England) Order 2004.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to UK farmers of a levy to fund compensation payments in respect of slaughtered TB reactors. [158572]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not made such an estimate but as a general principle our proposal is that farmers would pay into a levy fund to meet half of the projected costs associated with disease control, including compensation. However, no decision has been taken on whether the levy would cover endemic diseases such as TB, or indeed what costs would be covered. These issues will be in the consultation document on the levy proposals that we are working on.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 6 January 2004, *Official Report*, columns 247–8W, on bovine TB, whether TB reactors that are negative on culture are considered to have been infected with *M. bovis* bacilli. [158589]

Mr. Bradshaw: Cattle reacting to the intradermal comparative test are considered to be affected by bovine tuberculosis, regardless of culture results. The main reason for carrying out bacteriological tests in those animals is to identify, for epidemiological purposes, the strain of *M. bovis* responsible for the infection rather than to validate the skin test results.

There are several reasons why reactors may be negative on culture:

A very small proportion (0.5 per cent. or less according to the veterinary literature) of reactors without visible TB lesions can be caused by bacteria closely related to the *M. bovis* bacillus.

Cellular immune responses (which give rise to the skin test response) will be evident at earlier stages following infection than the pathological changes caused by the disease (e.g. visible lesions), and probably before bacterial loads are sufficiently large to be found by standard culture methods.

M. bovis is a fastidious organism to grow in the laboratory, so culture methods are less sensitive than the skin test.

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Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis the Independent Science Group concluded that interference in the Krebs trials had had no discernible impact on the statistical integrity of the trials. [158596]

Mr. Bradshaw: The main technique used by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) for monitoring whether badger densities in the trial areas are consistent with the treatments, the 20 per cent. surveys of trial areas, showed that badger activity levels changed in line with the treatment given (proactive, reactive or survey-only). Furthermore, the ISG carried out various statistical analyses on the data from the reactive and survey-only areas of the Randomised Badger Culling Trial. These have shown a consistent effect of reactive culling across trial areas.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who was in charge of the conduct of the Thornbury trial; and what his or her current position is. [158597]

Mr. Bradshaw: Dr. Harry Thompson was in charge of the conduct of the Thornbury Trial. He is now retired.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her best estimate is of the number of badgers killed during the Thornbury trial. [158599]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not possible to give a number. The method of culling, gassing, meant many badgers died underground and could not be recovered.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle herds in heavily infected areas have demonstrated resistance to TB infection; and what explanation has been adduced for this phenomenon. [158603]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are many possible reasons why some herds in heavily infected areas remain uninfected. Since 1994, approximately 70 per cent. of herds in current yearly tested parishes have had no confirmed breakdown. The TB99 epidemiological survey is investigating risk factors. The next report of the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB will include some results from the analysis of TB99 data from before the foot and mouth disease outbreak and, possibly, more recent (2002) data.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the badger population of the Isle of Wight is; what its health status is; and whether TB herd breakdowns have been reported on the island in the last five years. [158607]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not have an estimate for the current badger population on the Isle of Wight; nor do we

have information on its health status.

The number of new bovine tuberculosis (TB) breakdowns on the Isle of Wight in the last five years is given in the following table.

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	Number of new TB breakdowns
1999	(1) ₁
2000	0
2001	0
2002	(2) ₁
2003	(2) ₁

(1) TB confirmed.

(2) TB not confirmed by post-mortem or culture results.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average cost per Krebs area was of the Krebs trials. [158657]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not possible to give a realistic figure for the average cost of a Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) area. This is due to a number of factors such as the differences in treatment ascribed to the RBCT areas, the differences in enrolment time of the RBCT areas, and the number and type of culling operations carried out.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what appeal mechanisms are available to applicants for a Section 10 licence under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 in the event that an application is refused. [158664]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the first instance appeals should be made to the Wildlife Administration Unit of the National Wildlife Management Team (part of the Rural Development Service) who are responsible for issuing licences under this legislation. Each appeal is assessed to determine the basis on which it has been made and is then handled accordingly.

If the appeal relates to the policy of the Department in implementing the legislation, it is passed to the Wildlife Integration and Conservation Team within the European Wildlife Division for a response. If the issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily the appeal is passed to the Head of the European Wildlife Division (Defra, Floor 1 Zone 10/D, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6EB).

If the appeal involves how the applicant or case were dealt with, it would be passed to the Team Manager of the National Wildlife Management Team to investigate and respond (RDS, Burghill Road, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, BS10 6NJ). If the issue(s) cannot be resolved the case is forwarded to the Department Impartial Complaint Adjudicator (Defra, Area 7E, 9 Millbank, c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR). The Adjudicator will determine whether the correct procedures have been followed and if the outcome was appropriate.

This appeal mechanism will be considered as part of the ongoing public consultation into the procedures that the Department adopts in handling applications under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many herds have suffered repeat breakdowns since 1997. [158676]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since 1 January 1998, 2,413 ¹ herds have suffered repeat breakdowns.

¹ Provisional data downloaded from the State Veterinary Service database on 4–5 March 2004. Subject to change as more data becomes available.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff are employed in tracing cattle from farm movement

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books after a new breakdown; how many years back such traces go; and what the success rate is in tracing suspect cattle. [158682]

Mr. Bradshaw: The number of staff involved in each tracing will depend on how many movements there have been associated with a TB breakdown. In most cases, a new TB breakdown is allocated to a case Veterinary Officer, who is responsible for prioritising and initiating tracings from the herd. In addition, there is at least one person in each Animal Health Divisional Office who is recognised as having a specialist interest and ability in

dealing with tracing work.

The start point for tracings is usually the last clear test. How many years back traces go will depend on the testing history of the traced herds.

It is not possible to give a figure regarding the rate of success in tracing cattle except at disproportionate cost.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to combat bovine TB. [162030]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have a five-point strategy for dealing with bovine TB, based on the recommendations of the Krebs report 1997:

Protecting human health

Testing cattle for TB and putting controls in place

Developing a TB vaccine

Carrying out research into how bovine TB is spread

Carrying out a badger culling trial.

On 9 February, the Government launched a consultation on proposals for short term cattle-based measures to prevent the further geographical spread of bovine TB. The consultation also seeks views on the key principles on which a new long-term strategy for tackling bovine TB will be developed. The consultation period ends on 4 May 2004.

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