

Sunday, August 08, 2004

Relocation, Relocation, Relocation - Tb Takeaways..

When a cattle herd is diagnosed with a Reactor to the intradermal skin test, the vet carrying out the test issues a movement restriction notice (Article 12 of a TB2 notice) - a standstill - on all cattle on the holding.

From that date, cattle can only move to direct slaughter, or occasionally under strict DEFRA licence to another premises under the same restriction.

The movement restriction continues until the herd has a clear test.

So what about the wildlife?

While the NFBG (National Federation of Badger Groups) accuse farmers 'dodging Tb tests' (more on that later) many Questions raised by Owen Paterson MP, reveal an incredible opportunity for the spread of Tb by the involuntary translocation of badgers. (That's not when they walk into your farm by themselves, but when they arrive in the back of a vehicle, and are released by 'others' in the name of 'animal welfare'.)

There are no restrictions on where 'sick / mended' badgers are released by 'sanctuaries' .

These places are not licensed by Defra, and although they may use a 'voluntary protocol' to release badgers, this is neither drawn up nor approved by Defra.

Animal hospitals are not legally required to test badgers for Tb before release.

There are no statutes preventing the 'relocation' of wild animals - even diseased ones.

Well that's smart isn't it? The cows are nailed to the floor, but these appallingly inefficient cage traps have given the badger activists a golden opportunity. They don't have to catch it and it can't bite. The cage even has a convenient carrying handle and hey presto - a Tb takeaway. Your place or mine?

Describing her work in Somerset at Secret World, Pauline Kidner wrote in the BBC Wildlife magazine (1999) of the difficulties of relocating badgers within the area where they'd been found. (Turfed out?)

"Recent events have led us to question the procedure. (Of releasing them back into familiar territory).

Two badgers were brought to us and treated for fight wounds. After being released, both were returned to us after suffering further and more severe fight wounds. They had to be put down".

"Our rehabilitated badgers when released for some reason not known to us are not accepted back by their own kind. They must be returned to sites unoccupied by badgers".

Your place or mine? Is the landowner consulted? Does he even know?

This elusive 'voluntary protocol' referred to by Defra in PQ's had our Ben getting seriously excited a few weeks ago. Mr. B. thought he'd found the Holy Grail. Test the badgers and only cull the infected ones. Sorted then? Well not really.

The old 'Brock test' has been trundling around for years, in fact another 'trial' was set up in blaze of glory in the late 1990's to test it. It wasn't finished. It failed. Didn't anyone think to tell him?

The Ministry - MAFF (Defra in another life), knew before they started that the live badger test was rubbish on a supposed negative result, but they had to be seen to be doing 'something', and Mr. Paterson's PQ's teased out the same answers in 2004. Pretty good on a positive, but dangerously ineffective - in fact 60 percent wrong - on a negative result.

Defra say that if used 3 times, the accuracy increases, but if the badger comes from "a population with a background prevalence of infection of 10 percent, then there is a 2.7 per cent risk of the animal still being infected". (26th March 2004. Col 1085W).

Perhaps we'd better ask what happens to the test if the 'background prevalence' is above 30 percent, as in the last figures released. I'm sure someone's worked it out.

SVS (State Veterinary Service) say that when used on a large group the Brock test gives a more accurate result. But Ms. Kidner and Co. are dealing in ones and twos, NOT a large group. And of course the well meaning, but totally misguided people who just pick up a caged badger and release it 'in the wild' use no test of any description.

15,666 cage traps had been 'damaged' in the Krebs trial. That's 57 percent of them. And 1827 'disappeared'. Were they occupied? Defra doesn't know. But what they do know is that the 'efficiency' - and by that they mean that a set trap actually turns up with a badger inside it - is a maximum 80 percent and can be as low as 30 per cent.

The Krebs trial was supposed to assess the efficiency of culling badgers and was set up in areas of high cattle Tb. But for every 10 badgers they target, the ISG and John Bourne chose to use a capture method that they knew would only account for say half that target?

And that method gives the opportunity for the translocation of Tb - anywhere and to any other species.

You couldn't make it up.