

Tuesday, July 13, 2004

## Michael Jack - "There's no Silver Bullet"

### Devon farmer Bryan Hill - "Yes there is"

Efra committee chairman Michael Jack, this week urged government to make use of all the tools available to them to combat the scourge of bovine Tb. If current policy remains unchanged, this is forecast to cost the treasury £300 million annually by 2012. Although he mentioned vaccines (10 years away?), bio security (passing the buck) and BCG for badgers, he said there was no 'Silver bullet' to solve the problem of a predicted 20 percent annual increase in cattle Tb.

Enter Devon farmer Bryan Hill, with just such a tool. It's called population management.

Over the last few years Mr. Hill watched as his badger population exploded. At its peak he estimated there were over 1000 surrounding his farm - 10 times as many as the land could cope with.

He and his neighbours watched in horror as Tb crept towards them. First 15 miles away, then 8 and then 3. Mr. Hill knew his badger population was at territorial saturation point, and after 40 years clear of Tb, should the disease hit them, the consequences for the cattle farms where they lived and bred so successfully, would be catastrophic.

He warned Defra. Their solution was to suggest Mr. Hill applied to them for a license to close down some sets. Move the badgers on.

Horrified, Mr. Hill refused the offer. Defra's one way gates at about £25 each, would have cost him £1000 - the set he was concerned about had 52 entrances! But his main concern was the effect on the badgers and his neighbours. To move the badgers on as Defra suggested, would encourage the fighting for territory which is known to spread Tb, and to further saturate an already overpopulated area. Reckless and short sighted under the circumstances.

The only license Mr. Hill has applied for (and obtained) has been to close an empty set off. This to prevent incoming badgers being re infected.

In 1998/99, only a few months after the first dead badgers were found in the fields, one after the other the farms started to go under Tb restriction., Many cattle were slaughtered, and at its height, 19 farms formed a major hotspot outbreak of bovine Tb.

The great and the good came to inspect. John Bourne and Rosie Woodruffe of the ISG were taken around the farm to see the problems. Bourne remarked that it had the highest population of badgers he had seen. He also confirmed that Defra, having been cajoled into collecting and post morteming just one of the many dead badgers found there, would exercise 'constructive ignorance' and not see fit to allow Mr. Hill sight of the result. On another educational visit, Debbie Reynolds who is now dealing with Tb from Defra's Page St. headquarters, suggested fencing off the farm. It has over 10 miles of boundary fence in 6 blocks. And 1000 badgers would starve.

All these highly qualified professionals were reminded by Mr. Hill of cause and effect. "When the South West and beyond becomes a huge area of bovine Tb, don't say you weren't warned - and don't pass the buck, and blame the farmers", he told them. Do they remember that?

Mr. Hill filmed dead badgers, emaciated and starved with overgrown claws and abscessed bodies. A compassionate countryman who cares deeply for his animals, both farmed and wild and the land under his tenure, he examined the Badger Protection Act in detail and found that there was scope in it for him to alleviate the suffering of these sick and dying badgers, on welfare grounds.

He filmed some to record their miserable state, and then shot them. And he has continued to do that. Any individual turfed out by the main resident social groups, is targeted in single hole sets left for the purpose. 'Hotel' sets. "If the badgers don't want it, then it's sick and I don't want it either" says Mr. Hill.

His silver bullets have slowly cleared not only his, but most of his neighbours' farms of Tb and they have remained clear.

Today there are several sets of badgers on Bryan Hill's farm and those of his neighbours, but they are a world apart from the ones he filmed 5 years ago. These are healthy and vibrant, a valued part of area's ecology and a part of which he is quite rightly, very proud.

The BBC showed Mr. Hill's films of sick and dead badgers, after Michael Jack's announcement. Although invited to comment on Mr. Hill's badger management strategy, the reporter said that the National Federation of Badger Groups had declined the BBC's offer.

And the result of his strategy?

His own herd, and 90 percent of his neighbours are clear of Tb.

Stress on the 19 herds of cattle of 60 day tests? None.

Cost to neighbours of moving diseased badgers on to them? None.

Effect on badger health and welfare? Huge improvement.

Cost to the taxpayer? Nothing. Not a penny.

Mr. Hill's Silver bullet of management of a population, would appear to have hit its target.

Posted by Matthew at 10:16 PM

No comments:

Thursday, October 19, 2006

## "Nature is having its own unofficial cull"

Last year we told how farmer Bryan Hill of mid Devon, had 'managed' his badger population to exclude the sick and suffering individuals which the groups had turfed out, and thus had gradually kept a very large area bTb free - but with healthy, stable groups of badgers living alongside the cattle.

<http://bovinetb.blogspot.com/2005/03/update-silver-bullet.html>

Mr. Hill, has written of this year's extraordinary weather conditions and their relation to bTb in cattle, in the *Western Morning News* : <http://tinyurl.com/y963jq>

where he points out that the very hot dry summers of 2005 and 2006, have had a huge effect on badger behaviour:

*"...this summer, 95 per cent of the badgers' natural food sources vanished in the drought. Water supply, streams, ditches and puddles all dried up, causing the biggest natural 'peturbation' of infected badgers since foot and mouth."*

Mr. Hill points out that under these circumstances, baked earth with worms deep underground, and a very limited natural water supply, the badgers had two choices: *"Stay and starve, or move and fight"* [for territory already occupied by other groups of badgers] ..... or they had a third option.. *"to drink, eat and hide in barns, sheds or under stacks of bales ; spreading bTb to cattle. "*

It is this close contact, often within farm buildings and involving 'shared' water and feed sources that, in our experience is the cause of btb cattle breakdowns which are depressingly long, bitterly persistent and difficult - though not impossible - to control. The main sett and its group are not the problem, it is the badgers which they have turfed out that will lurk around farm buildings - as Bryan Hill says. But this hot dry weather has forced even established groups to either move, and then fight for territory, or stay, sharing feed and water with the cattle.

*"The same thing happened with foot and mouth, only it wasn't drought that caused the mass badger movement, but the slaughter of cattle on hundreds of farms .... [ ] .. no cattle, no muck, no worms; just long grass, covering thousands of acres."* And then as now, Mr. Hill points out the badgers left to search for food, a situation he has been told by farmers all over the SW this summer, which is happening again.

*"...starving badgers in sheds and barns, carcasses going through balers and forage harvesters; nature is having its own unofficial cull this summer"*.

Mr. Hill's letter is addressed mainly to Trevor Lawson of the Badger Trust, vociferously defending all badgers -

especially the sick ones - which Bryan Hill has made a point of putting out of their misery, to protect the rest of the group, and the cattle. He concludes;

*"..... I've never made any secret that if there are any sick badgers in this area, for their own welfare and to protect the healthy badgers and the cattle, they will be killed. I'm proud that I didn't just sit waiting for my cattle to be tested, killing the reactors, then on the same day turning what was left of the herd out with infected wildlife. Proud that I didn't leave sick badgers to nature's long merciless cull, freely spreading infection as they die a long, slow death. "*

*"If he (Mr. Lawson) thinks that by changing the cattle tests without removing wildlife infection, just killing ever more cattle in the hope that bTb will be contained, then his head is in the clouds with the flawed science..."*

Mr. Lawson's job, as did his predecessor's, the fragrant Elaine, depends totally on 'defending' badgers. But it does not go as far to defend them from Tb:

see our posts: [Badgers don't suffer from TB!](#) and [A slight wheeziness'](#)

The cynical amongst us may point out that if the problem of Tb in badgers was solved, as Bryan Hill has solved it in his patch of Devon, then Mr. Lawson and many more bTb 'beneficiaries' would not have a job at all.

Posted by Matthew at 8:28 AM

No comments:

Sunday, March 06, 2005

## Update - The Silver bullet.

### ***"Sick Badgers are Shot - 5 years clear in Devon's worst Tb hotspot"***

We told the story of farmer Bryan Hill's strategy for clearing Tb ([archived on this site](#)) and it's probably timely to update the story. Veterinary surgeons in mid- Devon tell us that up to 60 percent (Yes that's 60 not 16) of their cattle farmers are now under Tb restriction. But not Mr. Hill, nor many of his neighbours. In the late 90's Bryan warned the ministry of the population explosion of badgers in the area. The warnings were ignored.

*"In 1998, we did not have Tb in this area", he said, "but we started to find dead badgers in the sheds. In the spring of 1999, we were one of 3 farms to go under tb restriction. But within eighteen months another 19 farms were affected."*

After the devastation caused by BSE and FMD, Bryan Hill told Ministry vets and John Bourne who visited the farm, that he was not putting up with this (Tb) , when it was controllable. An enthusiastic countryman and ecologist, neither was he prepared to see badgers suffering - as they were doing. We described his 'strategy' in the earlier *'Silver bullet'* post, and Bryan has continued 'managing' all his wildlife whether it's deer, raptors or badgers. Using the Protection of Badgers Act 'mercy killing', Brian watches for badgers excluded from a social group. He monitors their whereabouts in what he calls 'hotel setts', single hole refuges left for this purpose. If those setts become active he watches for the 'health' of the occupant, and if it appears in distress or bears the unmistakable signs of Tb, he shoots it.

*"I had another clear Tb test a few weeks ago" he says, "and that's over 5 years clear in a badger / tb hotspot - so make of that what you will".*

We would also point out that Bryan's 'strategy' hasn't cost the taxpayer a brass farthing. He has not eradicated badgers, his badgers are alive and well, healthy and active. Aware of endemic tb in the badger population, it's the ones THEY exclude that he targets, now the farms' population is under control.

Bryan has put it to Defra that Devon and Cornwall (*and the rest of the country*) could be clear of tb in a very short time, believing the problem to be a 'political one'.

He comments "*just because a badger is protected, would you let it go out and suffer unreasonably?*" and "*if we are advised to wear a face mask and gloves, to handle them when they are dead, how much worse is it when they are alive?. They are passing on a disease which causes suffering and are starved into a slow death*".

Although frustrated by the current political situation which is not controlling tb, Bryan is adamant that his 'strategy' is working and he cites non other than our own Dr. Flat Earth King for inspiration and guidance.

*"Dr. King, the CEO of the National Federation of Badger Groups has said herself that she has taken suffering badgers to the vets to be put down. What I'm doing is no different. By being vigilant and sensible - I have dealt with it. "*

5 years clear in a Tb hotspot. He certainly has.

Posted by Matthew at 7:49 AM 3 comments:

Thursday, October 19, 2006

## Peturbation.

Much has been made of the so called 'edge' effect of the Krebs badger dispersal exercise and the resulting 'peturbation' of badgers. Personally speaking, I'm not too bothered about John Bourne's 'edges' - or any other part of his anatomy for that matter - it was what did **not** happen in the middle of the Krebs' areas which should be of concern. Peturbation, or put simply and not so anthropomorphically, the mixing up of badger social groups thus encouraging territorial scrapping, bite wounding and spread of bTb, is said by some to be the trigger for bTb in cattle.

The answer from the Badger Groups, is to leave well alone. Leave the badgers to their own devices, even letting Tb act as a population depressor and all will be well. This of course is absolute rubbish, as experienced by three of our contributors, all of whom did exactly that, and whose cattle paid the ultimate price. 'All was not well' at all. But Bryan Hill's letter (*post below*) and our observations of the effect of FMD on the badger (and other wildlife) populations, got us thinking that this 'golden goose' term, 'peturbation', about which many speak, but few understand is a natural phenomenon anyway.

When Dr. Tim Roper, formerly of Sussex University, put night vision cameras into farm buildings in Glos., he found that the badgers were using them as a local Macdonalds. Not one but three 'social groups' were regularly feeding there and sharing feed with cattle. Likewise the experience of Staffordshire farmers, unable to grow or harvest crops on a field adjacent to a wildlife park, sat up one night and watched to see why their grass was flat, and nothing was growing. They counted over eighty badgers trundling along to be fed shed loads of peanuts, for the 'benefit' of a paying public. Eighty ? That's a damn big 'social group'. Prof. Harris from Bristol reckoned about eight was stable, then updated this figure to ten a few years later. Pity nobody told the badgers.

So what of 'peturbation', and what is its effect on bTb?

Logically, even without the 2005 / 2006 drought stress as described by Bryan Hill (*below*), and depopulation of cattle from thousands of acres in the time of peak feeding for badgers which happened during FMD (*see our posts on Rosie Woodroffe's 'Letter from America', below*), movement of the population is inevitable. Old badgers will fight with younger males, lose the battle and be turfed out, and younger animals have to find their own 'group' structure to survive. Nothing is set in stone. That combined with very large territories in parts of the UK, and simply not enough pee for the alpha male to scent mark 6 sq. miles every week or so, means overlapping of territories will occur. Likewise feeding opportunities seem to indicate that groups will intermingle if a large and regular food source is available.

So is food source the key? With bTb '*endemic*' in UK badgers (thank you Mr. Bradshaw) for sure anything that stirs up and stresses the population forcing movement is bound to have a dramatic effect on the disease, primarily in the badgers, but then spilling out into sentinel cattle and other mammals.

But this is where Trevor Lawson, Bourne, Woodroffe *et al* differ from the farmers who contribute to this site. Leaving

an endemically infected population to fester, in our experience, is not an option. Our cattle are victims of that - even, or especially, within Krebs' areas. But neither is causing the territorial scrapping stress (as we prefer to call 'perturbation') as did the Krebs' badger dispersal trial, cage trapping in general and activist 'opportunities' for release or Tb-takeaways in particular.

Which is why, from the early days of this site we have been pushing for whole sett gassing, to reduce population stress, this preferably with the help of Warwick University's PCR to identify badly infected setts, followed by continued removal of 'dispersers' or super excreters, living alone in single hole setts or farm buildings.

That Mr. Hill has described his own 'population management' of a heavily infected area, with such stunning success is a victory for common sense, and the result is a healthy badger population living alongside clean testing cattle. But more importantly, the opportunities for territorial scrapping are gone. There is no perturbation if the whole group is dispatched underground. No 'perturbed' animals searching for lost relatives, and instead encountering vicious opposition.

There is no territorial scrapping, bite wounding and stress induced Tb because the main groups which are left, just quietly spread out.

The problem of Tb infected setts reinfecting incomers is solved too - at least for a time, as decomposing carcasses in a sett appear to prevent immediate recolonisation. But what do we know? Probably not a lot. But certainly more than Bourne and Co. - and we're still learning - mainly because we are prepared to listen.

Posted by Matthew at [10:45 AM](#)

No comments:

Thursday, May 24, 2007

## The right to reply

One week ago, The Badger Trust issued an [Opinion](#) piece to Westcountry paper 'Western morning News'. In it, Trevor Lawson described how under the Freedom of Information Act, the Badger Trust had obtained from SVS details of farms under restriction in 'Beaworthy, and its surrounding parishes'. Armed with this information, our Trevor then decided to do a hatchet job on a single farmer in the South West Tb hotspot, who by 'managing' his badgers and using their selection of chronically sick ones, has, he says, kept approximately 30 farms in an undefined area of mid Devon clear of Tb for eight years. He is proud of his healthy vibrant badgers and no doubt if asked would have shown Mr. Lawson - had he deigned to ask. But no, Trevor got a figure from SVS and off he went, armed and dangerous.

Mr. Hill is wrong, said Trevor and his claim is "utter nonsense". But worse than that, those who give him credibility, are "willfully ignorant".

So what exactly did Trevor ask? Because to get the correct answer, it is always wise to understand the situation on the ground. Remember those 14 million animal movements, which were actually postcards? Data x four in some cases. We do.

As Mr. Hill points out in his [Right to Reply](#) published today, he is a 'countryman' not 'superman'. and the Beaworthy area of mid Devon, we are told, is huge. The thirty farms on which Mr. Hill's policy has worked so spectacularly form a small part of that very large whole. And of those 31 farms, 30 are clear. One on the edge has a single reactor. So, 99.9 percent of the cattle in Bryan's patch are clear of TB in area which Trevor has found, has 24 per cent farms under Tb restriction. Almost a quarter. Healthy badgers and healthy cattle. We would call that a success - but hey, what do we know?

And more importantly for the health and welfare of the badgers, they are a valued part of the ecology in this area. They are not 'eliminated', 'eradicated' or any other words of high profile emotive spin, which add little to the debate but keep the Badger Trust's collection boxes rattling. We had a paper delivered asking for £50,000 to 'help the cause'. Would that be to save badgers or jobs?

For the record Central Science Laboratory has identified behavioural differences between badgers excreting *m. bovis*

and those uninfected. A parliamentary question regarding this 'atypical' behaviour of badgers in the 'super excreter' category was asked in March 2004. The badgers which Mr. Hill describes so graphically as 'excluded, wandering over longer ranges and into farm buildings', and is roundly castigated by Trevor Lawson for speaking 'more farmer nonsense'. That'd be about right, however, Mr. Bradshaw's answer - for which, as ever, we are most grateful, confirmed that:

"badgers excreting *M. bovis* are potential sources of infection for other badgers and cattle. The term 'super excreter' is used for research purposes to identify a sub-group of infected badgers from which *M. Bovis* has been isolated from several different clinical samples. These animals are thought to be in an advanced stage of disease progression and survival analyses have shown that they exhibit a higher rate of mortality than uninfected animals. (That means they die)

Research conducted by the Central Science Laboratory has identified behavioural differences between badgers excreting *M bovis*, and uninfected ones. Badgers excreting *M.bovis* had larger home ranges and were more likely to visit farm buildings.

23rd March 2004: Col 684W [ 158375]

We had hoped that members of the Badger Trust might support this type of 'management' of an endemically diseased population until such time as the scientists get off their backsides and ratchet PCR up the political agenda. Instead we see the night of the long knives.

Posted by Matthew at 5:09 PM 4 comments:

Sunday, December 15, 2013

## TB testing on Dartmoor

South West newspaper, the Western Morning News has some interesting columnists and one such is Dartmoor hill farmer, **Anton Coaker**, - [link] who breeds hardy suckler cattle, high up on the moor.

His herd is under TB restriction.

(Anton is on the left of the picture.)

Never short of comments about how bureaucracy treats his business, this is his latest offering on the process of TB testing scattered moorland suckler cows, just before Christmas.

Enjoy:



"Once more, we're embroiled in gathering over 300 head of cattle from sprawling miles of moorland, to shove them through the race for yet another TB test. The logistics of this operation take a lot more than the 4 days of actual testing, and are not especially welcome just now.

We've had to fetch cattle back from places where they were happy, and now they're busy scalping off the last of the grass about the in-bye. The breeding ewes were forlornly hoping this bite would carry them through until they were all safely tuppied- but they're to be disappointed.

I suppose I should express my thanks to whoever it is organises these things that we had a time-served vet who didn't miss a beat, and a dry-ish week means we might get stock sorted out again before the place goes completely pear shaped.

If all this were getting rid of TB, I'd happily oblige, but given that I can't see any hope of things improving, you can imagine I'm a little fed up with the idea. Still, at least the AHVLA -the state vets- are right on the case. With dazzling efficiency, just as we were finishing the main lot of jabs for the 3rd time in this year, a letter arrived explaining at great length how we are in a 12 month interval testing area. The incompetence is jaw-dropping. It's no wonder TB escalates, if this is how they run their end of things.

Would I do things differently? Well, since you ask, should I awake from this twilight loony land, where up is down, and left is right, and find myself emperor, I would take some steps.

First, and most urgent, I would draw a line across the country where the pox seems to be already in the wildlife, and take draconian steps to ensure that it didn't continue its march up the M6. Then I'd set about locating and removing the infected wildlife.

This might be by pouring resources into testing their scat, or by buying Bryan Hill a couple of metaphoric pints and asking him to show me how to tell for myself.

While I was at it, I'd want some boffin to come up with a far better test for the cattle. Perhaps a couple of million quid bonus for whoever comes up with the goods would help em focus their minds.

Alpacas and the like would be dragged into the testing regime and put under the same movement rules as cattle with immediate effect. Anyone objecting would be nailed to the wall by their ears, alongside anyone who mentioned the word 'vaccination' in the presence of El Presidenti Coaker.

There. I feel better now.

More of Anton's musings can be seen [on this link](#).

We'll post a summary of the latest TB news next week, but meanwhile Happy Christmas (and to Anton, whose TB test described above, was clear)

But in the spirit of clearing zTB, he'll have to repeat it all again in 60 days' time.

Posted by Matthew at 7:37 AM No comments:

Thursday, February 15, 2007

## New 'hotspots' emerge

Farmers Weekly reported last week on emerging new hotspots of Tb in areas where it had been unknown for years. (That would be just like most of the contributors to this site, ten years ago then - ed.)

Sorry, no link to this, so we type it in full:

"Fears are growing that this spring might bring an explosion of bTb (in cattle) following last year's dry summer and changes to the skin test.

Devon farmer, Bryan Hill is certain that new hotspot areas are emerging across the region and will only get worse over coming months. "We have been Tb free for eight years but I expect it to come back this year following the dry summer."

With growing badger populations fighting over limited food resources, the weaker animals would have been more susceptible to disease, claimed Mr. Hill. They would have had to look for easier sources of food and water, bringing them into contact with cattle. "Tb takes seven to twelve months to show up on the skin test after exposure to infection, so I expect herds to start going down now".

Ben Bennett, DVO (Divisional veterinary Officer) with the State Veterinary Service agreed that Tb could increase this spring, as it had after previous dry summers. More cattle being tested before the introduction of the new preMT rules on March 1st. could compound the rise, particularly if the (early) presence of Tb had been missed last year with the change to Dutch tuberculin, which he fears maybe less accurate.

However, the new preMT rules were unlikely to have much impact on Tb in the absence of disease control in wildlife, said Mr. Bennett. "Cow-to-cow spread has not been a common occurrence over the years. We are all aiming for a healthy population of cattle and wildlife but you cannot make inroads unless you deal with the disease on both sides".

One group of farmers in a new Tb hotspot is calling on all livestock farmers to write to their MPs demanding government action. Richard Turner, Neil Briggs and Alan and Susannah Hoskin's dairy herds near South Molton, Devon, all tested positive for Tb in mid January - for the first time ever.

A number of organic and pedigree herds, all have found the compensation to be inadequate; a particular problem for the Hoskins who have lost 32 of their 120 cow herd. A closed herd for the last seven years, the Hoskins' vet hailed their farm the 'most biosecure of any in his practise'.

"This is the biggest reaction we've ever seen and the only way it could have entered the herd was via a wildlife vector" said Alan Jacques from the Market Veterinary Centre, South Molton. "TB is a growing problem - and with the government just ignoring the reservoir of infection (in badgers) it is very difficult to see how we are going to get it under control".

Quite.

Posted by Matthew at 8:08 AM 2 comments:

Sunday, March 13, 2005

## "Well done - Partner"

At a time when the badger population is at saturation point with endemic tuberculosis causing suffering and a lingering death to many, and a spill over from which has condemned hundreds of thousands of cattle to a premature end, Defra has backed an award for the NFBG.

At a ceremony attended by Eliot Morley, the NFBG received the Defra backed 'Partner of the Year' award for its work against the odious pastime known as 'badger baiting'.

The timing of this 'award', as tuberculosis in the cattle herds reaches an all time high and 350 vets (even those relying on Defra's LVI licenses ) have signed a letter voicing their concern into the Minister of State's handling of the situation is a vivid reminder - if farmers needed one - as to where Defra's loyalties lie.

Shadow Minister Owen Paterson MP, declared he was *'flabbergasted'*.

He continued *"You cannot let one species, a dominant predator like the badger take over like this. Wildlife needs to be 'managed'. To leave things as they are would be incredibly cruel to badgers. While we slaughter cattle with bovine Tb, badgers are suffering as the disease is allowed to run its course"*.

The National Farmers Union took a similar view, and while commending the NFBG for its work against badger baiters felt the announcement of the 'award' and the involvement by Defra was *'badly timed'*.

Having cleared his farm of sick and suffering badgers, and kept the area Tb free for 5 years, farmer Bryan Hill is less diplomatic. *"Defra backing awards like this when we have a major problem all over the country is the most stupid thing I've ever heard."* he said, *"If nothing is done to tackle this disease, then it will become a disaster"*.

We have posted comments and research on this site from Wildlife Trust members who back 'management', and control of dominant predator species for the benefit of less high profile members of the ecology. We have logged the damage and disease caused by a population at saturation point of badgers with endemic tuberculosis, who have learned to their cost the benefit of total protection under the law. Far from 'protecting' them, the misguided, highly vocal anthropomorphism which elevated these beautiful animals to 'cult' status in the first place, has by its very success, now condemned them to a slow, lingering death.

As tuberculosis in the UK cattle herds reaches nearly 6 percent of the national herd, and the cost to the taxpayer is predicted as £2 billion over the next ten years (surely a couple of *'schools and hospitals'* at least) with impeccable timing, Defra has shown a cavalier disregard and utter contempt for the industry it pretends to represent.

Thanks 'Partner' - Why are we not surprised?

Posted by Matthew at 6:58 AM 4 comments:

Thursday, July 15, 2004

## Cause & effect - A farmer forum.

"There are 2 sorts of cattle farms. Those with Tb and those who are going to get it". NFU Wales.

"Where you are farming cattle, you are essentially farming badgers"

Dr. Chris Cheeseman, Woodchester Park.

Several farmers who have experienced Tb in their herds have contacted the authors to support Bryan Hill's observations of changes in badger behaviour, which they noticed prior to a herd breakdown. All have been supported by a badger ecologist, who also pointed out that they are signs of a population at saturation point. Below is a summary:

### 1. Badgers dead on the roads.

These will often have been 'marking territories' and will leave territory open to adjacent groups. Several dead in one area, would be an indication of lack of 'alertness' and / or weakness in these victims of RTA kills.

### 2. Badgers dead in fields.

Really bad news. Only a very sick animal will choose to die in the open, away from shelter and seclusion.

### 3. Long scratch marks on crossing places.

This indicates overgrown claws. Badgers need short, sharp claws to dig. When the claws are long, hooked and overgrown they can't dig and will seek food elsewhere - often in cattle buildings.

4. Single, often shallow holes, away from main sets.

Although this can be the home of a young lone male, turfed out by the alpha female of a group as his testosterone level rises, it may be the last refuge of a single 'disperser'. These are excuded from the main social group, and often in the later stages of Tb. And if claws are overgrown, the hole will be shallow - just enough to hide.

5. Sets in unusual places, where territorial pressure has pushed a group to build on - for example flood plains. When the water comes in, they will have to swim out and find space elsewhere, provoking the fighting for territory associated with Tb. Flood water also drowns earthworms, the main preferred food source of badgers.

6. Prolonged dry weather.

Will drive worms deeper, and more difficult to dig, especially for those with overgrown claws. Weaker members of the group will often go hungry and enter farm buildings to search for food.

7. A single badger curled up in corner of any building.

8. An active 'run' which suddenly stops.

9. A set where rats, carcasses, or the unmistakable stench of death is coming out.

10. Overpopulation. Too many sets.

Sets encroaching into grassland, rather than in the quiet of woods. Sets under farm buildings and into silos, where there is regular 'people activity'. Dustbins being raided.

The birth of the 'urban badger'?

You shouldn't be aware of badgers. Badgers in the daylight, or an increased 'awareness' that they are around are bad news. All these signs, although they can be associated with the ingress of Tb infected badgers, are also a sign of a grossly overpopulated species.

Any change of cattle farming practise will affect its resident population of badgers whether that is crops grown or cattle numbers.

And the more densely populated the badgers, the bigger the effect.

Posted by Matthew at 11:36 AM

No comments:

Saturday, March 10, 2007

"One cannot tell a sick badger....."



The following comment appeared on the site, after our posting "Survey after survey..." which we quote in full:

*The Badger Trust has welcomed the admission by animal health and welfare Minister, Ben Bradshaw, that a cull of "sick" badgers is impossible.*

*Speaking in yesterday's debate on the dairy industry [1], Mr Bradshaw said:*

*"We are well aware that TB is a difficult problem. However, we also want to be careful to ensure that any decision on badger culling is guided by the science. We do*

*not want to initiate any sort of action that could be counter-productive.*

*"As he [Mr Geoffrey Cox, Conservative, Torridge and West Devon] well knows, one of the things that all the science says is that a piecemeal, patchy culling regime for badgers could make matters worse. One of the other myths that a number of people still repeat and that it is worth exploding while we are on the subject is that it would be possible to have a cull of sick badgers. That is not possible. One cannot tell whether a live badger has TB. One can tell only through a blood test. Any badger cull would have to include healthy badgers, as well as sick badgers."*

*Responding, Trevor Lawson, public affairs advisor to the Badger Trust, said:*

*"The vast majority of badgers, even in bovine TB hotspots, are not infected with bovine TB. Of the minority that are infected, most are not even 'sick' - long term studies at Woodchester Park show that most badgers with bovine TB show no adverse symptoms and go on to live and breed normally for many years. Bovine TB is not even an important cause of death in badgers [2].*

*"Mr Bradshaw's admission that countless healthy badgers would be slaughtered in a badger killing strategy is welcome. It explodes the myth, repeated by the farming lobby, that only sick badgers would be killed whilst healthy badgers would be protected [3]. The grim reality is that a badger cull would be a grotesque slaughter on a massive scale that will irrevocably damage public support for farmers."*

ENDS

1. See Hansard, 8 March 2007, Column 1657.
2. Cheeseman, C., 16 January 2006, Farming Today, BBC Radio 4. Dr Chris Cheeseman is the outgoing director of the Central Science Laboratory's research facility at Woodchester Park, Gloucestershire.
3. On 31 January 2007, the NFU used an opinion poll to claim that 74 per cent of the public supported a cull of sick badgers. The NFU did not report that the 38 people questioned in the poll had been told that the NFU wanted the "culling of infected badgers and protecting healthy ones, in much the same way as diseased cattle are dealt with at the moment". The panellists were not told that no such mechanism exists for killing the minority of infected badgers. On 13 February 2007, NFU deputy president Meurig Raymond admitted that "any badger culling strategy would need to be intensive and thorough". On 28 February, NFU spokesman Anthony Gibson admitted that virtually 100 per cent of the badgers in a culling area would need to be killed.

So despite all the cash, all the 'science', 'one ' may not be able to identify a sick badger? Not true. Another badger can and PCR could - given the political will to use the goddam thing. And that 'vast majority' of badgers which are not infected? Just how vast is a 76 percent infection rate in badgers trapped in Broadway Glos. 1986 - 97? (Bourne's 4th report to Bern Convention) Sheesh, talk about standing figures upside down.

It is absolutely no use the Badger Trust rubbing their hands in glee at these inane comments from a politically engineered spin doctor, which prevaricate the situation to an even worse level than now. We have said many times on this site that a blanket cull of badgers is as obnoxious and counter productive to us, as Defra's carnage was to most sane people during FMD. There is another way, and we are getting seriously fed up of repeating ourselves.

We have described the 'management' of large and mainly healthy badger populations in mid Devon, by man who lets the **badgers** decide who is sick. When they do and exclude it from the group, he will put this loner, this disperser out of its misery before it can infect anything else. That Tb is endemic in the badger population is not something of which the Badger Trust should be proud, nevertheless as this is the reality of several years of complete protection for the species, it is with this that we all have to deal.

Trevor Lawson is correct in quoting Woodchester's research on the length of time a badger can sustain itself, have cubs, and yet show no ill effects from Tb. That does not mean that it is not infectious. In fact that is why a badger is such a successful maintenance host. It is not killed by Tb straight away and it can do all these things quite comfortably for several years - while shedding, and infecting everything it comes into contact with. However when the disease does start to debilitate a badger, the remainder of the group will oust it. And it is this 'badger' selection process which has been so successful in mid Devon, clearing a ' hotspot' of Tb in the cattle while maintaining the social structure of healthy badgers.

See **BRYAN HILL'S** story, which we covered in 2005. Thirty two farms in this 'managed' patch of Devon are still clear

of bTb after 8 years.

For boys who like toys, rt-PCR does work on sett materials to identify those inmates capable of onward transmission of the disease, and leave behind the groups not transmitting and healthy. Warwick have had good results, others trying to replicate (repeat?) less so we understand. More recent work is encouraging - but again no fine tuning yet. No urgency there then? Personally we would lock all the researchers into rt-PCR and bTb in a windowless room; no coffee, no toilet - until they had sorted out a viable assay, and set a timetable for validating it. And we would have far more success if the Badger Trust would accept that there are people like us about, who have had no cattle to blame for extensive breakdowns, but who still only want to cull out the infectious badgers.

As farmer Malcolm Light from Hatherleigh, Devon at the recent NFU conference said to David Miliband:

*"As farmers and stockbreeders we have been accused of spreading bovine Tb throughout the cattle and wildlife populations. We have been accused of making a profit from the disease compensation - and then complaining to government that it's all their fault. Tell that to the organic dairy farmer with a closed herd, who has never bought a cow in his life, lost half his herd to Tb infection [received 'compensation'] at a fraction of their market value, lost his milk contract, sacked half his staff, and couldn't replace these cattle even if he could find them, because there is no place for 'organic' cattle in the tabular valuation".*

It will happen folks. It has to. The technology is there. It is the political will to use it that is missing and the result is 'A slight wheeziness' - or so the RSPCA would have us believe. The pictures tell a different story. And it is with this 'result' - the reality of endemic tb in the badger population - that the Badger Trust is 'delighted'.

Posted by Matthew at 4:12 PM 43 comments:

Sunday, December 18, 2016

## Christmas thoughts 2016 - and a turkey to chew on.

As Christmas draws nearer, Defra has launched another Consultation - [link] document to stuff into your Christmas stocking. This is a proposal to continue a 'management' strategy for badger numbers in cull areas, after the initial four year blast. The document explains thus:

1:3 Licences have been issued under section 10 of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to enable the culling or vaccination of badgers for the purpose of controlling the spread of TB in endemic TB areas. When successfully completed, these licensed intensive culls can be expected to reduce cattle TB breakdowns (see paragraph 3.2) in an area for around seven and a half years. To prolong the disease control benefits it is necessary to maintain a steady badger population at the level achieved at the end of the licensed culls.

Now that would seem to indicate that the moratorium on section 10 (2) a of the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, bought and paid for with £1m bung in 1997, has been quietly lifted?

But we digress. The consultation document continues:

1:4 Natural England (NE) would need to licence a supplementary form of culling to achieve this. [ *Ed- the disease control benefits of a smaller number of badgers*] Continuing with badger control in this way is consistent with the TB Strategy's adaptive, evidence-based, long-term approach to disease control and would complement the other measures within the Strategy.

The paper explains that two such farmer-led operations have now completed successfully their fourth and final year, eight areas have two or three years to run and more than 30 other areas have expressed interest in starting operations.

And then possibly the most sensible thing that the CVO has said in a long time:

The UK Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) advises that preserving over the long term the benefits achieved through these operations is important to sustain the good progress being made on the strategy.

In other words, a few disparate patches shooting badgers for 42 nights, just doesn't cut it, given the scale of government neglect of zoonotic tuberculosis in wildlife, over the past two decades.

The document explains more:

4.12 Licensed supplementary badger control must start in the year following the conclusion of a prior cull, as allowing the badger population to recover and then undertaking badger population control risks causing a perturbation effect in cattle TB incidence and undermining the disease control benefits achieved.

What we glean from this, is that further culls may be licensed on a 5 year rolling timescale, and certainly before giving the badger population time to recover and reinfect sentinel cattle. But to qualify for this, farmers must also comply with a shed load of thought-to-be-important sops to the badgerists, in the form of cattle controls, biosecurity and they must continue to jump through ever increasing NE hoops.

None of which will have the slightest effect whatsoever.

The paper needs to be completed by February 10th 2017 and the online response form can be found [on this link - \[link\]](#)



Meanwhile, badger expert Rosie Woodroffe (who explains helpfully that she is a 'disease ecologist' ?? *Que?* Is there such an animal?) has posted an [abstract - \[link\]](#) explaining that the vaccinated collared badgers playing in west Cornwall showed no different behaviour patterns from their un-vaccinated sett mates.

With respect, the ranges and rambles that vaccinated badgers take, are of less importance to a cattle farmer, than the detritus they may leave behind. And caging, jabbing and then releasing a badger already infected (but possibly not infectious at the time he is jabbed) is perhaps not the wisest of activities, especially when even a clean badger can succumb to a dose of m.bovis, after vaccination.

Remember [poor old D313? - \[link\]](#) We do. And in that posting is the disgraceful preamble of Woodroffe's old boss at the ISG, explaining to the EFRA committee that at its inception, their £74m trial, from which Woodroffe is so keen to quote, had a predetermined conclusion. He taught her well.

In a recent visit to the Welsh Assembly, using ten words where one would suffice, our Rosie had this to say:

**Professor Woodroffe:** Yes, I should preface what I say, that, whilst I'm a disease ecologist, I am primarily a wildlife ecologist, so, you know, I'm not the biggest and best expert on cattle TB, except as it applies to badgers; badgers are particularly my expertise.

Nope Rosie; badgers are your bread and butter. And you'd like to keep it that way.

Read the whole ramble on [this link - \[link\]](#)

And you're gonna love this one, from 'disease ecologist' Rosie;

[81] **Professor Woodroffe:** In terms of other hosts, evidence suggests that the principle host, or the overwhelmingly most important host of TB in this country, is cattle.

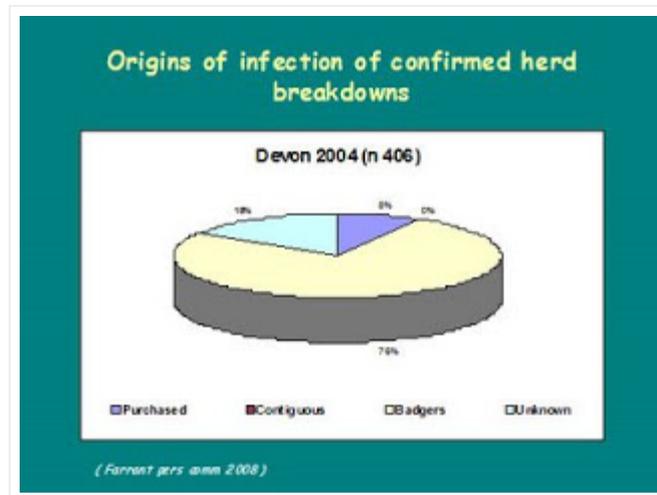
That 'evidence' would be the modelling from the RBCT would it? Where two parts cattle to one part badger was the rough assumption fed into Christl Donnelly's magic box? She continues:

The evidence strongly suggests that badgers are involved.

Badgers can and do give TB to cattle in those places where that's a serious problem. The best estimate of badgers' contribution is that they're responsible for about – in England, this is; in the high TB risk areas of England – **6 per cent** of newly affected herds.

Whaaaat!!!

Rosie then rambles into the range of 'confidence levels' for that wild assumption of just 6 percent badger related cattle breakdowns - presumably leaving 94 per cent of outbreaks down to cattle?



Actually she estimates 75 per cent - but let that pass. She's got an 'ology, after all.

But please look carefully at the pi chart above. We have more 'confidence' in the actual figures compiled in Devon by veterinary professionals, who having excluded cattle contact and bought in cattle, attributed some **86 per cent** of new breakdowns to - badgers.

So this year ends with another consultation, inviting farmers to mop up government negligence in disease control - and pay for the privilege; and more wild statements from people who make their living by keeping this gravy train going. As Bryan Hill - [link] says in his newly published book, "20 per cent of scientists say one thing, 20 per cent will contradict that and 60 per cent ask for more funding".

Merry Christmas from us all.

Posted by Matthew at 7:47 PM

No comments:

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

## Update - 'A way forward'

In April, we introduced a film made by wildlife photographer, Chris Chapman with the overview that a form of 'management' of what has now become an endemically infected wildlife population, was a possible way forward out of the impasse that has made the UK the worst area in the world, for bTB.

This week the film was launched, and in the next few weeks it will be seen by vets and other interested parties across the country.

An introduction by Richard Gard, an agricultural journalist with an interest in animal diseases, described how after seeing a short introductory piece, all major television channels had turned down the film. Too hot to handle? The footage of emaciated badgers which had died in dire straights was not what people would have expected from the ever rattling tins of the Wildlife and Badger groups. But that is what their ultimate protection of this species has delivered. So while the carnage of FMD were brought nightly to our screens by most TV channels, the equally destructive salami sliced effects of bTB on our cattle herds and those who tend them, are ignored.

With a strap line is 'Healthy Badgers - Healthy Cattle', the fact sheet opens:

"Wildlife assessments of groups of farms with adjacent land are an important step in the control of cattle TB to operate alongside existing procedures. The project is established to offer wildlife assessments to veterinary practices and their clients for the winter of 2009/2010. No funding for assessments is currently available."

We note that last snippet.

The political slant heaped on this pernicious zoonosis is such that successive layers of Defra (formally MAFF) civil servants and their political puppet masters have sung from a different hymn sheet when dealing with the problem at the farm level as opposed to the perceived problem tossed around in the Palace of Westminster. Thus we have in place a government totally divorced from what is really happening on the farms. And the folk tending Defra's corporate window box, haven't a clue what to do. Other than kill more cattle.

The result is that cattle farms are testing and killing cattle, and then 60 days later - killing more cattle. How extraordinarily and expensively short sighted? In warfare this is known as 'cognitive dissonance', a plan of action which although destructively wrong, may work in the end because all the cattle are dead. (Or all the badgers?) But the fallout from Defra's carnage is incalculable, both on the ecology as a whole and on other species, equally susceptible to TB, as we are seeing [here](#) and [here](#).

Mr. Chapman's film projects stoic but grim sadness from affected farmers as their animals are piled into Defra's maw, but many salient facts as well. From Dr. John Gallagher, the well made point that very small lesions in badgers will produce millions of bacteria, (*with just 70 needed to produce TB in a cow - ed. [PQs]*) and that from this, "it is inevitable that there will be cross contamination". Dr. Gallagher also pointed out that the disease is monitored and acted on in cattle, but ignored in wildlife.

Devon veterinary practitioner Andrew Cobner, reported a 50 percent increase in herd breakdowns in the area covered by his practice over the last few years, with continuous cattle testing and culling failing to clear problems. And several times the difference in the behaviour of excluded and extremely sick badgers, which were shown in Mr. Chapman's film, was highlighted.

And it is this 'management' of their own social groups by the badgers themselves, that is at the core of the message offered by the group promoting the film and the possible direction TB control could take, which is explained thus:

"At this time wildlife assessments are not accepted as an important part of TB control. We are convinced that a combination of wildlife assessment, veterinary involvement and cattle management can reduce the numbers of cattle being slaughtered and the number of farms under TB restrictions."

Richard Gard explained his understanding of the word 'science', which he said "involved the observation of natural phenomenon and the need to work within it". The process is ongoing he said, and once proved, the result becomes 'science'.

The core of this possible way forward uses the observed behaviour of badgers themselves, as its core. Mr. Gard described TB as the 'hidden disease of the countryside'.

He explained how farmers, their vets and maps of the farms, all formed bits of a disease 'assessment' jigsaw. Input of where cattle had contracted disease, fields, buildings or areas which were giving problems, were then examined by trained wildlife trackers and the results mapped. These maps gave a green light to setts and territories used by

badgers which clear cattle tests showed were healthy and conversely, the often single hole satellite setts, used as temporary lairage by badgers excluded by the main group and which could be linked to major breakdowns, often on several farms, were marked 'red'.

In recent papers, AHO risk assessment sheets from newly infected farms, showed an overwhelming majority - up to 90 percent - of breakdowns were attributable to wildlife, and in particular to badgers. This part of the jigsaw is then ignored. It was noted that both the BVA and BCVA had mentioned 'assessment' of all available information, in relation to their client's TB breakdowns, and also 'green and red' setts, within their policy documents.

The present non-policy offered by Defra is a shambles, but anything replacing it has to tick several boxes: the main one being the word 'targeted'. This assessment of several farms within an area, using the information offered by tested cattle sentinels, and interpreted by wildlife trackers appears to us to answer that selection process.

If the badgers don't want a skanky, sick individual within their group - why would any cattle farmer?

Healthy Badgers - Healthy Cattle Project ;

1. Initial discussions between veterinary surgeon(s) and farmers take place and an assessment area of ten square miles (6-10 farms with adjacent land) is indicated to the project. An initial meeting with the project team is arranged and local practicalities discussed. Maps showing field boundaries of each farm are to be made available. an area wildlife assessment is booked and paid for (£300 per farm)
2. The wildlife assessment is carried out over several days.
3. The farmers, vets and project team meet to review findings and the TB situation [ *of cattle* } in the area. Actions to improve bio-security of the herds will be discussed.

Richard Gard, Andrew Cobner, Bryan Hill.

Contact : 01647 24434 or email : rgard01@talkbusiness.net .