

Thursday 25th February 2010

Letter to Minister

The Badger Trust has written to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick, the Farming Minister challenging a statement he is reported to have made about bovine tuberculosis (bTB) during a recent visit to the South West of England. He said: "What I had perhaps not recognised before is the pain and suffering being inflicted on the badger population. They are dying in numbers. This is almost an issue for their welfare and survival as much as it is for dairy herds."

In its response the Badger Trust said: "We know of no scientific evidence or authoritative validation for a statement of that kind, though we are, of course, aware that similar but totally unsubstantiated claims have been made repeatedly by pro-cull lobbies in an attempt to emotionally influence the public to support their case".

The Trust referred Mr Fitzpatrick to Government-funded research that convincingly undermined those assertions which can best be categorised as deliberate scaremongering. "In the only published assessment of causes of mortality in badgers at Woodchester Park (Rogers et al., 1997) TB was not identified as an important factor. Furthermore, the badger population at Woodchester has risen, levelled off and fallen in size, whilst levels of TB in the population have fluctuated and bear no simple linear relationship to population size (Cheeseman et al., 1989; Rogers et al., 1999).

"In addition, badgers with active TB infections (i.e. they are excreting bacteria themselves) do not necessarily exhibit any clinical signs and may live for several years, and successfully produce cubs (unpublished data from Woodchester, but cited in Delahay et al., 1998 and Rogers et al., 1999).

Significantly, and more importantly in this context, it is widely accepted that TB in badgers can only be accurately diagnosed at post mortem, so the frequently advanced claims of obvious visual disease (in what are, after all, nocturnal creatures) have to be rejected".

Apart from the science and research findings, the Trust's letter said claims that bTB in badgers could be presented as a welfare issue without any supporting, validated evidence run entirely contrary to the experience of our members, who spend thousands of hours observing badgers in the field.

The letter concluded: "We accept that the control of bTB is a complex, long-term problem but we believe that your Government's current policy for England, based as it is on the best available science, is the correct one, and the Badger Trust will continue to oppose by all legal means proposals, including those of the other two main political parties, for some form of "targeted" cull of badgers".

Ends.

References

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Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across the United Kingdom

PO Box 708, EAST GRINSTEAD, RH19 2WN

Tel: 08458 287878 Fax: 02380 233896

E-mail staff@badgertrust.org.uk

www.badgertrust.org.uk

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