



The Badger Trust is challenging wild statements about bovine tuberculosis reported in the media by listing authoritative sources for related information



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Specialists like Devon farmer ** * can identify diseased setts, but often lack academic qualifications deemed necessary to do the job – a great pity’. News item: Western Morning News [1].**

SUCH RURAL MYTHS as this are increasingly prevalent. The reality, says the Badger Trust, is that it is virtually impossible even for highly qualified scientists, let alone lay individuals, to detect infection in live, uncaged animals in the field. The exceptions - and these are rare - occur when the disease is extremely advanced and the badgers have severe lesions and are potentially highly infectious.

The complexities of proving the presence of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) - even in dead badgers - are many and expensive, and they are spelt out, says the Trust, in the 2007 report [2] of the scientists overseeing the £50 million Randomised Badger Culling Trials, acknowledged by the Coalition Government as the only sufficiently rigorous survey.

That same report showed that of the 9,919 badgers killed in the RBCT between 1998 and 2005 only 166 had severe lesions.

Dismissing claims that selective culling of diseased badgers is possible using field signs the Trust points out that for 39 years scientists studied about 30 social groups of undisturbed badgers at Woodchester Park, Gloucestershire [3]. This showed that as many as 80 per cent of badgers never got bTB, with only five per cent becoming capable of passing on the disease. Research at Woodchester also demonstrated that infected badgers often shared setts with uninfected badgers, itself evidence that challenges the suggestion that any setts can be safely categorised as "infected".

Further research (4) also demonstrated that territories of social groups where bTB was particularly prevalent - ie "hotspots" - often abutted those of uninfected groups.

The Badger Trust draws particular attention to a report (5) in which Derek Mead, until recently a National Farmers' Union council member, wrote: "I and a number of other farmers have a Plan B. It's based on using specialist knowledge to differentiate healthy setts from diseased ones and targeting only the latter. The clear-up rate is 100 per cent, the impact on TB in local herds remarkable and dramatic. But of course, those who possess the skills to carry out such operations do not have any letters after their names, which is why their expertise is not being recognised".

Says the Badger Trust: claims like this, and there have been others in south west media, are totally unproven, have no scientific validation, and raise worrying issues of illegal actions. To assert that such highly contentious methods have 100 per cent success clearly implies that they have been tried and tested and that badgers, as a direct result, have been killed.

Even now, on the eve of the Government's highly contentious plan to launch licensed pilot "culls", badgers remain protected, as do their setts. Unlicensed slaughter is a crime.

[1] <http://www.thisisnorthdevon.co.uk/War-West-bet-healthy-animals-killed/story-14302865-detail/story.html>

[2]

http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/tb/isg/report/final_report.pdf

[3] Food and Environment Research Agency, Woodchester Park, Nympsfield, Gloucestershire

[4] Wilkinson *et al* (2000)..

[5] <http://www.thisisdevon.co.uk/DEREK-MEAD-Badger-cull-trials-targeting-TB/story-14199092-detail/story.html>