
Scottish Wildlife Trust

BADGERS AND BOVINE TB POLICY

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Introduction

The Council of the Scottish Wildlife Trust agreed to adopt The Wildlife Trusts' policy on badgers and bovine TB on 2 September 2010.

Summary of our policy on badgers and bovine TB

The extent of the badger's role in the transmission of tuberculosis to cattle is not yet clear. While the Scottish Wildlife Trust appreciates the concern in the farming community about bovine TB (bTB), we are opposed to the UK Government's proposals (published in December 2005) to cull badgers in affected areas.

Scientific evidence shows that culling will not solve the problem. It could even make things worse by causing infected badgers to range outside the culling zone, increasing their chances of spreading the disease further. Evidence suggests that leaving badgers undisturbed, combined with other measures, would be more effective than culling.

We welcome the UK Government's recent extension of pre-movement testing to all cattle over 42 days old and guidance on husbandry and biosecurity to reduce transmission. However, we are still concerned that our native wildlife may be sacrificed for political expediency, and we think that the UK Government could further investigate alternative strategies for a more practical solution. Therefore, we urge the UK Government to introduce:

- Strict monitoring of controls over cattle movements and pre-movement testing, to ensure compliance.
- Post-movement testing as used in other countries.
- Accelerated research to develop and trial a vaccine for cattle and badgers.
- The proactive promotion of stronger biosecurity measures to keep badgers and cattle apart, with compliance monitoring.

Key facts

- Despite the almost complete eradication of badgers in four test areas in Ireland, infected cattle decreased by only 60%.
- Pre-movement testing of cattle has already significantly reduced bTB in Northern Ireland.
- Compulsory pre- and post-testing was introduced in Scotland from September 2005.
- "Wildlife management should be based on evidence and scientific evaluation of likely outcomes." (Prof Aubrey Manning, David Attenborough and Prof David MacDonald)

Questions and answers

ARE BADGERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPREAD OF bTB IN CATTLE?

The extent of badgers' role is not clear from scientific evidence. The disease often occurs in the same clusters of badgers and cattle. However, no causal link has been found, whereas data for cattle-to-cattle transmission shows a rate of 50% to 80%.

DOES THE EVIDENCE JUSTIFY A CULL?

Current scientific evidence, including Defra's Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB, does not justify culling in areas less than 300km². Licensed and targeted culling—two of the proposed options—could even make the situation worse: disturbed badgers at the edge of the cull zone range more widely, increasing their chances of infecting other badgers and cattle. This is known as the 'perturbation effect'.

WILL DEFRA'S PROPOSALS WORK?

Scientists estimate that it is theoretically possible to reduce bTB with complete eradication of badgers in a cull zone exceeding 300km² (an area the size of the Isle of Wight). Culling to this scale is not only impractical, it is ecologically unacceptable and possibly illegal. Current culling methods do not remove all animals and, to be effective, would need absolute co-operation of all farmers and landowners in an area—not the case in trials so far.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS?

The Scottish Wildlife Trust wants these key measures to be introduced:

- **Leave infected badgers alone** - Research suggests that leaving badgers undisturbed will be more effective than culling.
- **A tighter testing regime** - Infected cattle are still being transported within infected and clean areas. Better pre- and post-movement testing is needed to reduce the spread of bTB. Pre-movement testing announced in December 2005 will help, as will the extension of the testing of cattle over 42 days old in March 2007. Once trialled, the new combined test for bTB should be used universally. The post-movement test introduced in Scotland will also detect infected cattle.
- **Biosecurity** - Cattle and badgers can be kept apart by simple changes such as fencing off badger latrines and setts, altering grazing regimes, and badger-proofing farm buildings. The UK Government is making steps in this area, but they should work proactively with farmers, and provide necessary resources to implement these measures.
- **Vaccines** - A vaccine should provide the most effective and sustainable control strategy. The current Defra-funded work on development vaccines for cattle and badgers should be accelerated. The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is co-operating with these trials.

About the Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland (registered no. SC040247). It is also a Scottish registered charity (charity no. SC005792).