

Badger Trust hits out at scaremongering nonsense

Claims by the South West National Beef Association's vice chairman about the spread of bovine TB were described today by the Badger Trust as irresponsible scaremongering, totally unsupported by validated scientific evidence.

Commenting on the postponement of a major cattle auction the NBA's Jilly Greed claimed that in Devon and Cornwall TB found in cats, goats, alpacas and llamas had come from badgers. She also claimed that more than 75 per cent of badgers in the two counties were either super-excretors (the most infectious type) or carriers of the disease. Responding, Badger Trust chairman Dave Williams described the claims as vitriolic nonsense, entirely without any supporting validation. "This is just another piece of propaganda, another clumsy bid to win public support for a futile, costly and unjustified slaughter of wildlife.

"Even in bTB hotspots like Devon and Cornwall most badgers are healthy (1). If she (Jilly Greed) has scientifically validated figures to support her claim, then let her produce them. We say she hasn't. The figures are pure fiction.

"So, too, is her claim that badgers are the source of the TB infecting some alpacas and llamas. If she disagrees, let her produce the evidence. As for badgers in gardens being TB carriers that threaten the health of domestic pets this is just another irresponsible scare tactic in an anti-badger campaign which is reaching farcical proportions." The fact that a cattle auction had been called off because one of the beasts had tested as a possible TB carrier, simply underlined where the real problem lay, said Mr Williams. "For decades without so much as a cautionary health check farmers have bought and sold cattle, taken their prize stock to shows and to markets, moved them freely from one farm to another. Yet bTB is a highly infectious respiratory cattle disease. To buy and sell in that cavalier way was inviting disaster.

"Cattle-to-cattle spread is very important in high incidence areas (2), yet many farming organisations have historically opposed sensible controls, more reliable and more frequent testing, and improved on-farm biosecurity.

"The aftermath of foot and mouth provided a classic example. Stock which had been crammed together for months, creating ideal conditions for the spread of the disease, were sold almost as soon as restrictions

were lifted. Farmers exported the disease to other farmers, locally and much further afield. Science proved that's what happened.

“The current bTB epidemic is a major problem. We in the Badger Trust and in all the other major wildlife conservation bodies, want to see it brought under control. The new, tougher testing and pre-movement control regimes backed by the Government and the scientists must be given time to work.

“Faced with a barrage of anti-badger propaganda we would ask the public to bear in mind the following important facts: the random badger culling trials showed that badgers can catch TB from cattle (3); despite decades of research no-one has yet shown how badgers infect cattle; talk of targeted culling of diseased badgers is pure make-believe; most badgers are healthy; and TB in badgers is rarely fatal”.
Ends.

- 1) *Of the 11,000 badgers killed in bTB hotspot areas in the random badger culling trials only 11 per cent showed any sign of bTB at post mortem—ISG.*
- 2) *ISG final report*
- 3) *Prof R Woodroffe, Proceedings of the National Academy of Science.*

For further information, contact Dave Williams on 07768 518064

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.

PO Box 708, EAST GRINSTEAD, RH19 2WN

Tel: 08458 287878 Fax: 02380 233896

E-mail press@badgertrust.org.uk

www.badgertrust.org.uk

Registered charity no.1111440

Company registered in the UK No.5460677