

For Immediate Release: Tuesday 15th June

Subject: Badger Trust Challenges Spread Claim

Following a news item in the influential *Farmers' Weekly* on June 4 the Badger Trust is writing to the magazine and to the National Beef Association for validation of a claim in a report that bovine TB was spreading in badgers at 10 miles a year. The chairman of the NBA, Christopher Thomas-Everard, was reported as telling a press conference: "But it must be recognised the disease is spreading in badgers at the rate of 10 miles a year, resulting in 50,000 badgers a year becoming infected and dying from the disease. Explain this to the general public and support for a badger cull maybe more forthcoming." This claim was neither substantiated nor challenged.

The Badger Trust says this claim runs clean counter to properly-validated research at the Woodchester Park project of the Central Science Laboratory (now the Food and Environment Research Agency) that proved the distribution and prevalence of TB in an undisturbed badger population was remarkably stable over decades with no evidence of rapid spread. Furthermore, both the Woodchester studies and the results of the Randomised Badger Culling Trial demonstrated that badger movement is associated with an increase in TB incidence in badgers, and culling causes perturbation which certainly will result in the spread of TB and an increase in prevalence.

As for the claim of 50,000 badger deaths from TB a year the Woodchester team found that only a very small proportion of overall badger mortality is caused by TB.

The movement of cattle, when considering the deficiencies of TB testing, is far more likely to spread TB from cattle to cattle, and from cattle to badgers. Such deficiencies are discussed in the recent biennial report for 2008-9 of the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis, University College, Dublin. Its badger vaccine project reports [1]: There are well recognised limitations in the use of the current diagnostics to detect all infected animals and this has led to renewed efforts to uncover novel diagnostic biomarkers that may serve to enhance the performance of the tests. Studies of single immunological parameters have so far been unable to unlock the complexities of the immune response of mycobacterial infection".

Ends

NOTE

[1] <http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/biennial%20report%20200809.pdf>. P16.

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

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