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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BBC CHALLENGED OVER BADGER GASSING ADMISSION

The Badger Trust is demanding a criminal investigation of a farmer who stood by while others gassed badgers with the exhaust of an “old petrol engine”.

The Report (BBC Radio 4, 8 pm, August 4) said the BBC had evidence that some were willing to take the law into their own hands and were gassing badgers, a protected species. The programme interviewed a farmer who showed the presenter one of the “dozens of setts” where he said badgers had been killed, but the BBC agreed not to name him. He said: “Just before Christmas every farm in this area had gone down with bovine TB, most of us had lost a lot of money, lost a lot of cattle, and we were fed up with the Government not doing anything, and we’re also fed up of seeing sick badgers struggling to live”.

The presenter, Nick Ravenscroft, then said: “The farmer claimed this sett was infected with TB”, and the farmer continued: “You have an old petrol engine, you put a pipe down the hole here, you have the engine running, and once the holes are completely blocked up you run the engine and that puts the badger to sleep underground. But it’s a sick sett. The whole family group is put to sleep humanely”.

Mr Ravenscroft asked: “Were you taking part in this?”

“I was present when it was done; I actually didn’t take part in it”, the farmer admitted.

Mr Ravenscroft: “There are plenty of people who would say that what was happening that night - which you were watching and friends of yours were doing - is not only illegal but it’s wrong and inhumane”.

The farmer replied: “I don’t think it’s inhumane at all. Is it actually inhumane to actually sit and watch an animal suffer? Answer that question for me. We don’t let livestock on our farms suffer a slow death. Why should that badger suffer a slow death over three or four years? Farmers are law-abiding citizens, but at this point in time through lack of action and lack of help from governments they are being driven to take this action. We don’t want to do it but it’s survival; survival of business and we want wildlife and our herds to survive. Why can’t that be allowed to be done without breaking the law?”

David Williams, chairman of the Badger Trust, said: “This interview showed the depth of ignorance among this farmer and his friends about the basic facts in respect of badgers and their setts and revealed the brutality behind the demands of the livestock industry.

What makes them think that this is humane? scientific research shows that all forms of gassing are ineffective at reaching all parts of a sett and are considered as inhumane.

- Small localized killing of badgers, can spread rather than contain the disease: amateurish and sporadic brutality like this is the worst possible action to take
- It is extremely difficult to prove whether badgers are infected.
- The average incidence of disease among badgers is known to be as low as one in eight, even in 'bTB hotspots'. There is no such thing as a sick sett, badgers living in the same sett do not all have tb. Researchers with 30 years of experience rarely see any badger showing signs of suffering with tb.
- Badgers are very tough and do not die easily; they would make every effort to dig their way out to escape choking fumes;
- The farmers mentioned on the programme are anything but 'law abiding citizens' and must be prosecuted".
The Trust is also challenging the BBC over an unattributed assertion in the programme that "since badgers became protected in the '70s the population has surged to an estimated 300,000". Mr Williams said: "The BBC must give the references for this figure. There has been no quantified estimate of population for 14 years. It must also quote any scientific basis for the clear implication that legal protection had caused a 'surge' ".

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