



## Wildlife Trusts' concerns over badger cull expansion

### Talking Points Document

To help you prepare for a meeting with your MP we've pulled together some key points to give you the background to our concerns and to help you frame your questions.

#### Background

The UK Government is due to make an announcement of new areas for badger culling this September and there is great concern that Nottinghamshire and neighbouring counties will be among areas where shooting of badgers will be allowed in an attempt to control the spread of bovine TB in cattle.

As you may know, the licensing of a cull in Derbyshire was successfully opposed last year after over 4,500 residents contacted their MPs to voice their concerns. This campaign was led by our sister Wildlife Trust in Derbyshire.

Bovine tuberculosis is a highly infectious disease of cattle which devastates thousands of farming businesses annually. Since the mid-1980s, the incidence of bovine TB in cattle has increased substantially creating an economic burden on the taxpayer and the farming industry, as infected cattle must be culled. We are very conscious of the hardship that bovine TB causes in the farming community and the need to find the right mechanisms to control the disease. However, we believe that a badger cull is not the answer and have been vaccinating badgers as a positive alternative.

#### The Nottinghamshire perspective

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has led a badger vaccination programme in the Vale of Belvoir on the Nottinghamshire/Leicestershire Border for the past five years to provide an effective and practical alternative to the cull.

Badgers only form one small dimension of the ecology of the disease. The evidence has always shown that badgers are not the primary cause of the spread of bovine TB in cattle: the primary route of infection is via cow-to-cow contact. These cattle based factors are being increasingly recognised as drivers of the disease, particularly cattle movements and slurry management.

We have long advocated for a long-term solution and, along with many others, were pleased to see the Government commitments to developing cattle vaccines, improving bio-security on farms – expanding badger vaccination programmes and phasing out the culling of badgers[1].

#### The need for urgency

We were extremely disappointed, then, to hear of the potential for culling licenses to be issued areas covered by our vaccination programme – which is part funded by DEFRA. The risk of vaccinated badgers being shot in a cull was one of the many reasons Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's campaign received the media attention and public support it did. Nothing has changed in 2020, and this risk is just as acute here in Nottinghamshire.

For a cull to be justified in the Government's terms, bovine TB has to be shown to be endemic in badgers in the area. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust has published a scientific review of the Government's Animal and Plant Agency (APHA) evaluation of causes of bovine TB in cattle and badgers in their



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county [2]. It showed that the methodology used to estimate the source of infection in outbreaks of bovine TB in cattle is subjective and biased, without clear evidence to support the claims. The analysis also showed that APHA's methodology and data neglected cattle-based risks such as persistent infections as well as shortcomings in testing and the contribution of cattle movements to the spread of bovine TB. There were no data at all on bovine TB incidence in badgers in Derbyshire.

Our assessment of similar data for Nottinghamshire flags serious concerns. As with so much relating to the badger cull, the evidence is wanting. We have tried repeatedly to get key evidence from DEFRA which clearly shows that bTB is endemic in the badger population in the proposed cull area and our project area, but to no avail.

In their response to the Godfray Report, which reviewed bovine TB control, the Government said that it wanted to move from lethal to non-lethal forms of disease control in badgers. It also said that one way to do this would be to establish a "Cordon sanitaire" in defined at-risk parts of the Edge Area...").

Our Vaccination programme if focussed on an Edge Area and it is ideally placed to put this policy goal into action. Having a cull in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire would undermine advancement of that goal.

Aside from the needless killing of an iconic species, one of the worst aspects of all of this is how poorly served the farming community has been by weak evidence and half-hearted policy changes. The livelihoods and wellbeing of farming communities are severely damaged by bovine TB outbreaks. They deserve more clarity and better leadership than what has been offered to date.

Should culling be approved within our Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme project area, it would be the first time in England where culling is permitted within an established badger vaccination project. Culling badgers in this area would therefore represent a huge waste of taxpayers' money, not to mention the financial contributions from the local farmers and the donations from the general public, or the massive investment of local volunteer time.

We invite you to learn more about the alternatives to the cull and would be delighted if you could join us on our next badger vaccination round in September. If you would like to share a statement of opposition to the cull we would be delighted to publish and promote this.

1) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategy-for-achieving-bovine-tuberculosis-free-status-for-england-2018-review-government-response/executive-summary>

2) Critical evaluation of the Animal and Plant Health Agency report: 'Year End Descriptive Epidemiology Report: Bovine TB Epidemic in the England Edge Area – Derbyshire 2018'.

<https://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/cy/node/2958>

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The Full APHA report can be found here.

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