



Brockwatch Bulletin



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www.brockwatch.org.uk

Newsletter of Brockwatch, the Badger Group for Northampton and South West Northants Issue 40



Still in the firing line

Find out more about the threatened cull and what *you* can do.

Badgers as target practice?

“Strongly minded” to cull

In July, Caroline Spelman announced that she was “strongly minded” to authorise a cull of badgers. But to find out if the shooting of free running badgers is an effective and humane method, “pilot culls” would be necessary.

The Badger Trust’s response was as follows:

Badgers are to be used as target practice. That, says the Badger Trust, is the effect of Caroline Spelman's Commons announcement that she plans to hold two pilot culls in the south west.

Nowhere in her Commons statement was there any mention of the culls contributing to a reduction in the incidence of bTB in the pilot areas nor was there any mention of carrying out post mortems to establish whether the badgers are infected. How can it be humane to kill an animal solely to see how long it has taken to die?

Says the Trust: “The Minister claims to be seeking a comprehensive and balanced solution. What she is proposing is likely to lead to a fragmented and confusing set of facts. They will bear no relationship to any existing science because the method of killing – shooting free running badgers at night – is untried, untested and its results unpredictable. The normal idea of a pilot trial is to test a proposal to see what the results are. The proposed pilot will simply use badgers as target practice to see if gunmen can shoot them, with no regard to whether they are diseased or healthy.

“The Minister has said that ducking the issue of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) is not an option, but what she has done is to submerge the issue in unscientific confusion in a way that is likely to damage the interests of the very farmers she is trying to help. For example, the Minister uses one set of culling figures (obtained by cage trapping badgers) to forecast the results of a completely different method of culling (free shooting). This is not science. It is guesswork.

“Sadly, she also continues to place undue emphasis on the claimed reduction that badger culling might make to bTB spread. At best that is estimated to be 16 per cent over nine years. For far too long, too much effort and time has been devoted to badgers and far too little to the main causes of TB spread - ineffective testing, lax controls over cattle movements, and illegal activities. She must shoulder some of the blame for that.

“The Minister also appears to have learnt nothing about the risks associated with perturbation, a behaviour pattern which applies only to badgers. The very best scientific evidence makes it abundantly clear: disturbing stable social groups carries a serious risk of making the spread of bTB even more of a menace, and the shooting method she puts her faith in will surely make perturbation much worse. Her claim that this pilot exercise is science led is not sustainable.”

Who will watch the watchmen?

The Badger Trust has also highlighted the high risk of fraud in connection with the pilot culls, saying that “Deceit in the dark will be easy under the Coalition Government’s scheme to allow running badgers in England to be shot at night when badgers are above ground. The greatest of many weaknesses in the proposed pilot trial is that those being paid to do the shooting will produce the only evidence on which a decision about efficacy and humaneness would be made.

“Although independent vets may well check for humaneness the shooters will present the carcasses for post mortem examination. Unscrupulous farmers or contractors could secretly bury any dead badgers showing signs of being killed by more than one shot or of extensive wounding. This could hardly be easier than in the dark with cover all round, making it unlikely that such shooters would be detected and so lose their licences. Worse, they would have a vested interest in ensuring a ‘positive’ outcome of the trial, leading to free shooting being adopted and more work for them.”

Full details from the Badger Trust website:
www.badgertrust.org.uk

Your country's badger's still need YOU!

Please sign the 38 Degrees petition



Campaign group 38 Degrees, well known for its successful campaign against the Government's planned sale of Britain's state-owned forests, is now fighting against the proposed culling of badgers in England.

At the time of writing 38 Degrees' online petition had attracted nearly 35,000 signatures. Many more signatures are needed. Please go online now and add your name:

www.38degrees.org.uk/page/s/badgers-petition

Afterwards, why not encourage your family, friends and work colleagues to do the same?

On its website, 38 Degrees says this:

87% of us agree on this: the government's current plans to shoot England's badgers simply don't stack up. The government's own scientific advisers warn that it won't solve the problem of TB in cattle, and could even make it worse. Government scientists say that if a cull isn't carried out "in a co-ordinated, sustained and simultaneous manner according to the minimum criteria, then this could result in a smaller benefit or even a detrimental effect."

Support the Badger Trust

The Badger Trust has been at the forefront of the campaign against badger culling. It continues to highlight the weaknesses in the case for culling, and submitted a detailed response to the Government's recent consultation on its plans for pilot culls involving shooting of free running badgers. The Trust needs all the help it can get – please check out its website (link on previous page) to donate, join, or help in other ways.

Support the Badger Protection League



Two dozen conservation and animal welfare organisations have joined forces to support a new campaign aimed at stopping the proposed culling of badgers: the Badger Protection League.

The League has a website with news on the campaign, and information about how you can get involved. They have a petition that you can download and print out, and a template for a letter which you can adapt and use to write to your MP.

The website has quotes from several of its high profile celebrity supporters, including:

Sir David Attenborough –

“The evidence is that a badger cull on a scale or level of efficiency that seems feasible will not solve cattle farmers' problem – that problem is truly serious.

Understandably, the feeling is that something must be done, but the evidence is that it should not be a badger cull.”



Chris Packham – “Will there ever be a day in my lifetime when I can wake up and know that Badgers are Mustelids and not Scapegoats? The science has been done, the writing is on the wall, but still this lunacy goes on . . .”

Doc Cox – “A badger cull would be cruel and pointless because the ‘science’ doesn't add up. Try to make your MP see sense. Even the daftest politician in the world can't be daft enough to think that slaughtering Britain's favourite wild animal is a sure-fire vote winner.”

Please visit the Badger Protection League website:

www.badgerprotectionleague.com

Fed and watered, and back to the wild!

Back in July, Steve received a report of a badger wandering up the high street of a village in south Northants during the daytime. Definitely not normal behaviour for a badger, and a sure sign that something was wrong!

Fortunately the badger retreated into a garden, where he effectively cornered himself. All Steve had to do on arrival was find the badger, which by that time had somehow vanished from sight. Spotting signs of digging near some metal racking (on which pots and various garden paraphernalia were stacked), Steve crouched down and looked underneath. Sure enough, there was the badger, seemingly asleep and blissfully unaware of what was going on.

Despite the badger's apparently dozy demeanour, extricating the black and white beastie from his makeshift lair was no easy matter. Eventually though he was out from under the racking, and into the waiting rescue cage where an initial assessment of his situation could be made. The conclusion was: this was one very dehydrated Brock.



Our thirsty badger's next trip up the village high street was by car, en route to Steve's kitchen for a few day's TLC – plus much-needed food and water.

Food was not of great interest to our befuddled Brock to begin with, but a bowl of water was lapped up with much enthusiasm. As was a second. Over the next few days more water was quaffed, and eventually the badger realised he was hungry too and started eating.

Unlike the cub who had shared Steve's kitchen last year, this badger, probably a yearling, was (once recovered and aware of his surroundings) fearful and clearly unhappy being in captivity. Release sooner rather than later was therefore desirable. Steve arranged for that release to take place close to where the badger had first been seen, but in a place where the countryside (and hopefully a nearby sett) was readily accessible.



Steve also arranged for Sue, who had originally reported the badger's plight, to be in attendance along with her daughter. Amazingly, this was in fact the second time that Sue had been involved in the release of a young badger which she had reported to Brockwatch.

Steve found a badger path at the release site, and that is where the rescue cage was set down. Sue lifted the door, and in a black and white blur of fast-moving fur, Brock was out and off along the badger path to freedom.



Another thirsty badger?

Thirsty? Well, the badger in question was visiting a south Northamptonshire pub!

It had been a nice, quiet weekend and Sue and Howard had been gardening when the phone rang. "Are you the badger people?" enquired the caller, a pub landlord. There had been a badger in a small grassed area by the pub car park for the last two days. It did not appear injured but a pub car park was "not the right place" for a badger.

So Sue and Howard downed tools and set off. When they arrived the badger was not in the grassed area so the nearby undergrowth and bushes were inspected, with no result. Then Sue checked out the stone wall enclosing the area and lo and behold, the badger was inside it. Somehow Brock had managed to squeeze through a very narrow gap and was settled in a cavity within the rather thick wall, with his backside facing the would-be rescuers! A prod with a stick to check whether or not the badger was alive met with a loud response.

It was not possible to extricate the badger from this unorthodox "sett" with the use of the grasper so Sue and Howard agreed to return in the evening, after some food and water had been placed nearby, to see if this had tempted the pub's guest to emerge.

Arriving at about 8.30pm, Sue and Howard first went in for a drink (no, not Badger Beer) then resumed the rescue attempt. Still no luck. As the thick stone wall formed one side of an old barn, Sue and Howard went inside the structure to check the other side of the wall, and took this photo. →

The rescue cage was then positioned on one side of the wall, while attempts were made to encourage the badger into it by means of prodding with a stick from the other side. Brock was staying put, so a change of tactics was needed. A squirt of water did the trick, prompting the badger to leap out of the hole in the wall and into the cage, where his or her displeasure at being evicted was made very clear!

A wound to the badger's head meant a trip to Leicestershire Wildlife Hospital rather than immediate release in suitable badger habitat.



At the Wildlife Hospital, the latest Brockwatch rescue joined one from earlier in the year, an orphaned cub which was picked up by Rob Douglas. Along with another orphan taken in by the Hospital, these badgers will be released back into the wild as a new family unit. We hope they will do well, and stay out of trouble!

Leicester Wildlife Hospital now has a purpose-built badger enclosure at its new site. To help defray the costs of this and the costs of caring for 'our' badgers, Brockwatch has made a donation to the charity.

Operation Meles

From the Badger Trust:

The Badger Trust was delighted that Mr Richard Crompton, the Association of Chief Police Officers' lead on wildlife crime, agreed to chair the national launch meeting in Sheffield on 20th September 2011 for Operation Meles. It was one of five events, coordinated across the UK to expose cruelty badgers suffer.

Operation Meles is an intelligence-led UK-wide police operation gathering evidence of badger persecution and targeting offenders. For the first time national statistics for badgers are available through the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU), and statistics on reported badger incidents are now compiled separately (available on the Trust's website, [www. badgertrust.org.uk](http://www.badgertrust.org.uk)).

Operation Meles is the start of a structured system of assessing the scale of badger crime, as well as wildlife crime in general. It will support the case for incidents to be formally recorded rather than simply reported. It also provides feedback to the public to encourage people to pass on evidence to the police or their local badger group.

Mr Crompton, who is Chief Constable of Lincolnshire, also delivered the opening address at Sheffield which was chosen for the launch because South Yorkshire is particularly affected by crime against badgers and other wildlife. The other national meetings were in Glasgow, Belfast, and Cardiff , with a further English event in the East Midlands, also a notorious hotspot.

Case studies

England

Northumberland police seized a mobile phone and found video of dogs fighting badgers, other dogs and a cat, and cock fighting. Police showed it to the county badger group which made a formal statement. There were also text messages to a former gamekeeper filmed putting dogs to snared animals and expressing pleasure at the baiting and killing. Both pleaded guilty and received five and four months' imprisonment respectively.



Scotland

At Dumfries a shepherd, keeper and farm manager was fined £3,500 after he admitted snaring four badgers, shooting them, and failing to inspect snares daily. The SSPCA found remains of six badgers in various states of decomposition, suggesting that snaring had been carried out over a long period.

Wales

After pleading guilty a man was sentenced at Rhondda to five months' imprisonment suspended for twelve months, a 12-month supervision order, 250 hours of unpaid work and disqualification from keeping or owning dogs for life. His mobile telephone had shown him using dogs to dig out and kill badgers, one an albino badger, and it also showed severe injuries to the dogs.

Brockwatch bits and pieces

Brockwatch AGM

On **13 December 2011** your committee will be meeting at **The Midway (Toby Inn)** at East Hunsbury (postcode NN4 0TG) **from 8.00pm**, where our pre-Christmas committee meeting will also serve as this year's Brockwatch AGM.

We would love to see you there. Attendance does not commit you to joining the committee, though we are of course keen for new additions for the reasons set out in our last newsletter.

Ultrasonic deterrents

Not everyone enjoys having badgers as guests in their gardens and you only have to see the state of some of the gardens in question to understand why. We therefore offer advice on deterring badgers from gardens, and we have also been offering some practical assistance by loaning out a device which emits ultrasonic noises when activated by its motion sensor.

Having received some positive feedback from those members of the public who have borrowed our ultrasonic deterrent device, we have invested in two more so that we can, when necessary, help more than one household at the same time. The devices are held by Rob Douglas, and Sue and Howard Hess.

If you know anyone who has badgers paying unwelcome attention to their garden, do let us know. Contact numbers can be found overleaf .

Collection at Wyevale Garden Centre

On **6 November 2011** we will be holding a collection for Brockwatch at the **Wyevale Garden Centre, Hardingstone**. Can you spare a couple of hours that day to help us raise funds for our badger protection work? If so, please contact Sue and Howard on 01327 342050.

This collection follows our attendance at two outdoor events earlier in 2011: Daventry Countryside Day, and Billing Fayre. We did not raise huge sums of money at those events (quite the reverse), but they were small events each lasting less than a day, which our small number of volunteers could cope with. They provided opportunities for us to raise more awareness of Brockwatch and exchange badgery information with visitors.

Website update

Steve is working on a new website for Brockwatch. The existing site is not that easy to update, and partly because of this it has not been updated for quite some time. Once the new site is up and running it is hoped that news items will be added regularly. There will also be a facility to sign up for e-mail notifications of updates. In this way we should be able to keep Brockwatchers informed in between newsletters, via:

www.brockwatch.org.uk



Caught on camera



Badgers love to dig. They also love to eat (and they are not too fussy about what they consume, although they certainly have their favourites). After a long day cooped up in their sett, suffering from the attentions of fleas and lice, they also love to come above ground in the evening for a good grooming session! That's exactly what they badgers in the above quartet of images are having. Nature is sometimes described as red in tooth and claw, but here we can see teeth and claws being used as nothing more than combs, for the purpose of dislodging pesky parasites.

Contacts: Brockwatch

Steve Jackson (R)	01327 706349
Sue & Howard Hess (R)	01327 342050
Rob Douglas (R)	01604 674509
Brian Timms	01604 700927

(R) = Rescue Officer

Contacts: Other

North Northants Badgers	01536 481770
Badger Trust	08458 287878
RSPCA (24 hours)	0300 1234 999

See this newsletter online in colour at
www.brockwatch.org.uk