



# Badger Cull

## What do we mean by 'badger cull'?

The 'badger cull' refers to the policy of shooting wild badgers in selected counties in England (Gloucestershire and Somerset) in an effort to reduce the incidence and spread of bovine TB among cattle.

## The badger cull – the facts

1558 badgers have been killed in the culls, many of which were likely to have been disease free.<sup>1,2</sup> The pilot culls in Gloucestershire and Somerset were found to be ineffective and inhumane.<sup>3</sup> The original randomised badger culling trial in 2003 found that culling badgers where TB was already present in cattle resulted in a 27% **increase** in bovine TB; where badgers were culled proactively reduced the incidence of bovine TB by 19% within the cull area, but **increased** the incidence of TB by 29% up to 2km outside the cull area as a result of perturbation (badgers moving from one area to another because of the disturbance caused by culling).<sup>4</sup>

In Wales, plans for culling were replaced with a programme of vaccination.<sup>4</sup> The way in which the disease may be transmitted from badgers to cattle is, as yet, not known.<sup>5</sup> Cattle-to-cattle transmission is a significant factor in the spread of the disease.<sup>6</sup>

## What drives the badger cull?

The badger cull is driven largely by desperation. Despite the scientific evidence that a cull won't be effective, and may make the problem worse, farmers are still demanding it. Why? Because bovine TB is extremely costly to farmers – the cost of dealing with a TB-infected herd can be as much as £27,000.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, most farmers don't want to see their cattle suffer with what is a terrible illness, and they regret the need to slaughter infected animals. In their desperation, many see culling as the only way available to them to stop the spread of the disease.

## What are the alternatives?

Vaccination is the primary alternative to culling. Lord Krebs has suggested that biosecurity, "keeping cattle away from badgers, badgers away from cattle, and preventing transmission [of TB] between cattle," should be the primary objective in the fight against bovine TB<sup>8</sup>

## What does the Bible say?

The Bible does not speak to this issue directly, as the causes of diseases like bovine TB were unknown in biblical times. There are, however, some general principles that can be applied.

*The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel (Proverbs 12.10)*

The use of 'righteous', to be one who is 'after God's heart' is significant. To be one who is righteous is to care appropriately for one's animals. On the face of it, this may be seen to favour culling, in order to protect the cattle that are in the farmer's care. But the facts show that culling is not only ineffective, it can make the problem worse and lead to disease being spread to a wider area, putting more cattle at risk. The righteous action, therefore, is to forego the 'quick fix' and instead look for a long-term solution that prevents disease in both cattle and badgers.



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*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11.6–9).*

This vision of the 'Peaceable Kingdom' is a vision of creation as God intends and desires it to be – this is the kingdom that Christians are called to create, so far as we are able, in our own lives, and it is a kingdom in which different species live together harmoniously in peace. No one species is singled out as more important than the others. Using the Peaceable Kingdom as a guide suggests that the proper way to solve the problem of bovine TB is not to kill one species in order to protect another, but to work for a solution, such as vaccination, that allows all to live safely and peacefully together.

## What can Christians do?

- Pray – include the welfare of both farm animals and wildlife, and the wellbeing of farmers, in both public worship and private prayer.
- Support – there are charities, such as the Badger Trust, Save Me, and the RSPCA working to end the cull and convince government to initiate a vaccination programme instead.
- Make your voice heard – write to your MP and ask them to abolish the cull in Gloucestershire and Somerset, especially as it is unsupported by the scientific evidence, and to concentrate government efforts and funding on the development of a vaccination programme.
- Spread the word – tell friends, colleagues and others about the cruelty involved in the cull, its lack of efficacy and the risk of the cull spreading bovine TB into areas previously unaffected, and ask them to get involved.

