

Control of Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) Wildlife Risk Management – Part 4

WILDLIFE RISK MANAGEMENT AND BIOSECURITY BEST PRACTICE

When considering wildlife bio-security best practice it is important to know your own farm and walk every field boundary, marking on a map any setts, latrines, feeding areas and badger runs found – noting how things change through the seasons.

Check to see if there are setts being used close to your farm buildings, these badgers are more likely to forage in and around your buildings and feed stores. Badgers will live under sheds, in hay stacks and in barns, so check these areas regularly to see if anything unusual is occurring.



Fig 1: Example of easy access into a grain silo, evidence was found to suggest a badger was living within this silo.

Check cattle housing and feed stores for obvious places or signs of badger access. Try to ensure they are made secure and remove anything that may assist badgers to gain access - they are very determined animals.



Fig 2: Badger foot print showing four toes in a row with the fifth toe tucked away.

Close gates to deny access – gates and walls should be at least 3-4 feet high, solid and sheer to prevent badgers from gaining a foot hold. If gates and doors are more than 3 inches off the ground a badger may well get under it, or if the floor is soft a badger will scrape a gap under the gate to get in, so modify it.

If it is not possible to modify or secure a feed store it is worth considering solid feed bins with lids.



Fig 3: Example of good fitting doors that will prevent access to badgers.



Fig 4: Example of a gate allowing access to badgers.

Silage, hay and maize: – if you know where latrine areas are, try, if possible to avoid mowing over that area and/or using the hay or silage from these sites (i.e. at the edges of fields).

Keep silage and feed clamps covered and, if they aren't gated, we recommend you use a four wire mains energised electric fence across the face or around it to deter badgers.

Evidence from FERA research showed that electric fence wires placed at 10cm, 15cm, 20cm and 30cm intervals are effective at excluding

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badgers from stored feed but must be properly maintained to be effective and prevent shorting out (i.e.. overgrown vegetation).



Fig 5: Silage clamp providing unrestricted access to badgers.



Fig 6: Example of a retractable electric fence system.

Avoid grazing high risk areas e.g. if possible fence cattle away from wooded areas. Where possible do not let your cattle graze in fields where active badger setts exist and where there are signs of regular badger feeding or latrine areas.

Latrine areas can be found anywhere within the badger's territory but normally on or along defined boundaries and linear features and close to setts. Intensive grazing may encourage cattle to feed at field margins where there is a greater risk of contamination from badger faeces and urine in latrine areas. Consider fencing off active dung pits to prevent cattle gaining access, if practical to do so. The tell tale signs of a dung / latrine area is that the grass is often longer and darker in colour.

Supplementary feeding at pasture may increase the risk of contamination as this will encourage wildlife to visit the area, so avoid feeding

concentrates directly onto the ground. When feeding in buildings clean up any excess not eaten by cattle – this may attract badgers.

Raise your feeders, troughs and vitamin / salt licks off the ground if possible.

Badgers are excellent climbers and will readily get above 4 feet off the ground if they can secure a foothold.

Raised troughs and feeders should ideally be free standing with sheer sides to 30 inches: this will help reduce access.

Badgers can climb into troughs that are higher than cattle can feed from, so it is important that trough surrounds do not provide a climbing frame.



Fig 7: Example of a raised water trough.

It is good practice to check your feeders and troughs before refilling for signs of badger faeces. Remove and clean feeders daily if it is feasible and dispose of waste feed appropriately. There will not be any visible signs of contamination from urine – regular cleaning is advised.



Fig 8: Ground feeding stock may increase the likelihood of badgers contaminating feed – a main badger latrine was only yards from this trough.

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Remove fallen stock and dead wildlife quickly and dispose of them appropriately.

If you are currently free of TB, don't think your herd is immune. There is a cumulative benefit to be gained from bio-security measures – the more you do the lower your overall risk and the likelihood of future breakdowns.

Advice on all aspects of TB and reducing your risks can be found in the Animal Health website [LINK
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/managing-disease/bTb/publications.htm>]

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