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Dorset Badger Vaccination Project (DBVP)

The Dorset Badger Vaccination Project is now in its second year of operation. The goal of the project is to establish a number of areas where badgers have been vaccinated, and hence are immunised, against bovine TB (bTB) and then to vaccinate outwards from those areas. Badgers are just one source of bTB infection in cattle. By vaccinating badgers in this way we will remove them from the cattle – badger – cattle route of bTB transmission thus allowing farmers and land owners to concentrate on the other important measures required to combat this terrible disease.

Badger vaccination has been shown to be extremely effective in protecting badgers (and hence cattle) from bTB. Trials carried out by scientists at the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA), now the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), resulted in a 74% reduction in vaccinated badgers testing positive for bTB and when just one third of a social group had been vaccinated the risk to unvaccinated cubs was reduced by 79%. Vaccination does not cure an already infected animal but it does reduce the severity, progression and excretion of disease thereby reducing the spread of the disease. Furthermore, vaccination does not cause perturbation which can be responsible for an increased spread of bTB when culling is misguidedly used as a means of control.

Who are we? The Dorset Badger Vaccination Project (DBVP) is made up of a number of AHVLA trained volunteers who have completed a four day course at Woodchester Park, working with government scientists and ecologists, in the trapping, vaccination and release of badgers and in the understanding of badger ecology.

In 2014 we began the year with just 3 trained vaccinators but we now have 11 with more in the pipeline. We began with just one team but finished the year with three and there is facility for more. We vaccinated on over 2,500 acres of farm land, trust land and council property and worked in partnership with the Dorset Wildlife Trust, local vets and other county vaccination teams. All costs for training, equipment, time, travel etc have been borne by DBVP through fund raising activities although some farmers/landowners have volunteered to cover the cost of the vaccine (approx £25 per animal).

Studies by researchers at AHVLA and the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) produced 3 key findings:

1. **The vaccine is completely safe.** It is the same vaccine that was used on British school children.
2. **There is no risk to cattle or non-target species from vaccinated badgers.** The vaccine **does not** interfere with stock testing for bTB.
3. **The vaccine works.** It establishes herd immunity, as it did with British school children.

Please note: Dorset Wildlife Trust are now vaccinating badgers on their reserves.