

WAKE UP! WAKE UP! IT'S YER BLACK 'N' WHITE...

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LICENSED TO CULL

INTO THE VALLEY OF DEFRA AS BADGERS FACE EXTERMINATION

Flying in the face of all the scientific evidence, the government's chief scientific advisor David King is urging for war to be declared on Britain's badger population.

Speaking to a select committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He contradicted the findings of the ten year and £34 million Independent Scientific Group (ISG) report into the transmission of Bovine TB between badger populations and cattle. The research programme involved extensive extermination of badgers in controlled zones throughout the country and resulted in the trapping and slaughter of 11,000 badgers.

Unsurprisingly it reached the same conclusion that wildlife activists had predicted when they begged the government not to carry out the killing – that transmission of TB in cattle is largely down to cattle. That this no-brainer even warranted such a scheme to prove it is evidence of the intensive farming lobby's grip on DEFRA (Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

Unfortunately the announcement probably signals another onslaught against wildlife, as the plans outlined by Mr King involve killing all badgers in areas not less than 100 square km, in an obvious attempt to overcome the evidence that shows that culling increases TB spread in neighbouring areas – the larger the area in question, the lower disease collateral damage in percentage terms. Clever eh?

Badger groups nationwide have vowed to take direct action. A spokesman for the the Coalition of Badger Action Groups (CBAG) told SchNEWS, "We took action against the experimental culling in the South West - we were out nine months of the year, chasing MAFF (Ministries for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries - now DEFRA) from their base in Truro. We obstructed them, dismantled traps and freed trapped animals. We were dodging MAFF, dodging farmers and dodging the filth but we destroyed 70% of the traps. Direct action will continue – but we're going to need numbers if they roll this programme out across the whole country."

Brock and a Hard Place

The ISG findings were summarised by John Bourne – the group's chair: "While badgers are clearly a source of cattle TB, careful evaluation of our own and others' data indicates that badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain. Indeed, some policies under consideration are likely to make matters worse rather than better... Scientific findings indicate that the rising incidence of disease can be reversed, and geographical spread contained, by the rigid

application of cattle-based control measures alone." - Pretty unequivocal you might think but its not good enough for the farmer-friendly DEFRA. Well what's a few thousand badgers between friends when there's all those meat-industry profits to be had?

During the past 28 years, DEFRA (and formerly MAFF) have killed more than 40,000 badgers in a failed effort to halt bovine TB outbreaks. In fact, TB in cattle has been increasing since 1986, including in areas where badgers have been eliminated, or where they have been shown to be free of the disease.

Bovine TB was almost eradicated from the national herd in the 1980s but there has since been a dramatic resurgence, actually neatly mirroring the increased implementation of more intensive animal husbandry techniques. Cases are still currently rising 14% year on year. And the disease cost £80m last year in compensation to farmers who had their animals slaughtered.

But over 80% of the budget for research into Bovine TB is spent on researching the badger link – and not looking into how the increase in TB in cattle goes hand in hand with the increase in all forms of communicable diseases amongst cattle.

TB or not TB

The modern farm animal is a hothouse flower, overbred and pumped full o' drugs for maximum meat and milk production using all the latest 'advanced' veterinary techniques. After a lifetime of overstocking, this animal is then trucked around the country for sale and slaughter.

In human beings, TB flourishes amongst physically and psychologically compromised individuals on poor diets and with inadequate housing. This is a fair description of life in cattle sheds and milking parlours. During winter months, cattle are kept in overcrowded, often badly-designed barns, conditions in which infectious disease spreads.

The persistent focus on badgers distracts from the serious health problems faced by intensively managed cattle in Britain. Many other diseases, such as pneumonia, E. coli, coccidiosis (a fatal diarrhoea), salmonella and mastitis, are also increasing in British cattle herds.

Desperate to defend their highly subsidised agri-business practices, farmers turn time and again to blaming the wildlife.

Responsible for the culling are DEFRA's Wildlife Unit staff, trained on the use of firearms specifically in relation to killing badgers. When



CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For being upfront...

One over-literal German school pupil has found the authorities (unsurprisingly) lacking a sense of humour. Known, for legal reasons, as "Sirin F", the fare-dodging fraulein has been riding buses free after finding that a local law bans only fare-dodgers who "do so surreptitiously". So, spotting the obvious legal loophole, Sirin does it very publicly in a T-shirt that says: "Legal note: I have not paid the fare and am thus a fare dodger." Sadly for her, cops thought this wasn't the ticket and nicked her.

they start to trap, they first lay out the badger traps near known setts and badger runs within the killing area. The traps are camouflaged and baited in a process known as 'pre-baiting'.

DEFRA will then decide when to start trapping; this can be anything up to ten days from the start of pre-baiting. DEFRA operatives then set the traps, so that badgers can be trapped during the night. DEFRA badger killers then come back in the early morning to check traps in their areas - if a badger is found it will be shot.

Badger traps are about three foot long and eighteen inches square, with a trap door at one end. The traps are made from square weld mesh and are painted black, dark green or brown, (the older traps are unpainted and rusty). They are usually baited with peanuts or sometimes corn and the doors are set with twine. Report any sightings of them to CBAG.

The badger slaughter policy has failed miserably. Bovine TB in cattle has spread to South Wales, Cumbria, Scotland and the Midlands (where next?). Often, TB jumps miles to unaffected areas. Badgers do not travel these great distances. But cattle do. The ISG report analysed culling trials begun in 1998, in which badgers were culled proactively, culled after a TB outbreak on a farm, or not culled at all. The trial, delayed by the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak, was eventually stopped early because reactive culling was clearly counter-productive - in response, the badgers moved around more and spread the disease, resulting in more farm outbreaks.

SchNEWS has learned that despite the ISGs findings, farmers in the Ouse and Cuckmere valleys in Sussex are demanding a badger cull. Local badger groups are already preparing for a robust response. A previous attempt to cull badgers in Saltdean in 2003 (just along the coast from SchNEWS towers) was halted after massive public outcry and the odd bit of scuffling in the street. The government isn't going to protect our wildlife - are you?

* **CBAG website:** www.badger-killers.co.uk or call the **Badger Hotline:** 07777 3572970 and for more info on badgers see www.badgertrust.org.uk

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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Dial GM for Murder

A Brazilian anti-GM campaigner has been murdered at a Syngenta GM crop trial in Paraná, Brazil. Via Campesina (The International Peasants Movement)'s camp at the experimental farm was shot at by security, killing Valmir Mota de Oliveira, a Movimento Sem Terra (the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement – see SchNEWS 505) activist. That morning 150 Via Campesina members had set up camp at Syngenta's site, and at 1pm a bus full of gunmen arrived and opened fire. Also killed was a security guard with two other protesters seriously injured.

This is the second time Via Campesina occupied this site, after Syngenta had previously illegally trialled GM soybeans and corn last year. At the time this was a victory, with the state governor signing a decree proposing to turn the farm into a centre for agricultural research to help rural peasants. Since then, the decree was overturned due to the pressure of the Rural Society of the West – a reactionary group of pro-agribusiness large-scale landowners, and other agribusiness interests – and Syngenta is pressing ahead with another trial crop. When the MST organised a march to the farm last November, they were blockaded by the tractors of the Royal Society, who fired shots in the air and beat the marchers with sticks, injuring nine.

Now Syngenta have brought in security firm NF Security (has a nice neo-Nazi ring to it!). The activist killed had been one of three MST members who'd received death threats from the president of the Rural Society – the other two managed to escape. The owner of NF Security has admitted that he gave the order to attack, and wasn't claiming the anti-GM protesters were armed. They have a Blackwater-style relationship as a private security firm to Syngenta and the local large-landowners. NF – which last month had illegal arms confiscated by federal police – is known to hire individuals with violent criminal records to form armed militias to carry out rural land evictions, for customers like the Royal Society.

Syngenta are the world's largest agrochemical company, and third largest commercial seed producer. They caused the largest ever genetic contamination in the US in between 2001-2004 when its GM Bt-10 corn was mixed with grain meant for human consumption.

They previously held GM crop trials in the UK – mostly herbicide tolerant or insect resistant crops – but, like Bayer and Monsanto, were forced to abandon plans for more crops in Britain in 2004. Since the mid nineties direct action campaigners trashing the trial crops and overwhelming negative publicity has kept them at bay (but the GM threat is back – see SchNEWS 583).

See www.viacampesina.org

Lahore of Babylon

Since last Saturday more than 2,000 people have been arrested in Pakistan. Among those arrested are lawyers, judges, journalists, human rights activists, academics, students and political activists. Due to the brutality of the police outside, students began demonstrating within their campuses. That has led to series of police raids on universities and arrests of both students and staff.

This crackdown is being conducted in the name of the War on Terror but one of the first acts of Musharraf's regime under the state of emergency was to exchange 'Islamic' militant prisoners for soldiers held captive by armed insurgent groups.

Demonstrate this Saturday 10th November 2pm outside Downing St.

War On Tara

Back over a choppy Irish Sea to the Hill of Tara road protests where digger-diving is thriving (see SchNEWS 600). Despite an ancient ring fort being recently discovered behind Soldiers Hill, the National Roads Authority have continued work on the destructive road through the historical heritage site, building during the night to avoid the attention of cultural conservation activists – but the tactic has done them little good against the drive and tenacity of the protesters.

Construction was held up on the first of November when twenty-one protesters stormed the SIAC (the firm building the roads) offices, terrorising the guards with badly played penny whistles! The security cabin was raided by the protesters who gained up-to-date info on the proposed route, maps, keys and documents revealing the details of workers and bosses of SIAC; full names and mobile numbers.

En route back from the office occupation, protesters temporarily stopped eight diggers from destroying more of the archaeologically significant landscape.

The following day, two digger diving crews stopped five machines in Colliers Town and barricades were thrown up in the road's path. Meanwhile at Soldiers Hill, a number of machines were stopped around the newly discovered ring fort.

One English activist was arrested for refusing to give his name and address to the police, which you are obliged to do Ireland, but was released an hour later.

Activists busy digger-diving then received a tip-off that the Minister of Transport Noel Dempsey was opening a new headquarters of Public Works at 2.30pm in Trim. Eleven protesters got there at 3pm to discover Noel Dempsey with Top Members of Fianna Fail (Irish Government) just leaving. They gave them some grief about the illegal motorway with little response but they did admit to not caring about their heritage. Noel Dempsey then scurried like a rat down a back street to retreat but was trapped by protesters, who asked why the suggested re-route which is 50 million Euros cheaper and 7km shorter isn't being used. Sadly he refused to comment and was whisked away with a police escort.

However, the chase wasn't over as determined protesters then followed him to the Knightsbrook Hotel and Golf Resort, where they met with forty others and besieged the complex. One person scaled the first floor balcony where the reception was taking place, with everyone shouting "Shame on you!" as Mr Dempsey retreated further into the hotel. Low police numbers led to the kitchen staff being used to hold the protesters back and when Mr Dempsey tried to leave he found the front two tyres of his official black Mercedes had been let down. The transport minister was left with no wheels. Maybe he should think about using public transport?

While the EU are now taking legal action against the Irish Government, whose many environmental breaches have led to thirty-seven different allegations of legal infringement by the canny Irish state. But all this will be of the slap-on-the wrist type of action as opposed to actually stopping the road – that battle is taking place on the ground, and as ever all comers are welcome. www.tarapixie.net www.savetara.com www.tarawatch.org

Tasmanian Devilry

The ancient forests of Tasmania look set to be chewed up and spat out as cardboard and woodchip as Australian government push ahead with a pulp mill plan.

The pillage of Tasmania has been going on since the white man arrived, steadily stripping it. In an area around the size of Ireland, there is now only 13% of original forest remaining – and licences already issued are intent on making that figure 6%!

Despite an opposition campaign by outraged Tasmanians and environmentalists alike, democracy as ever prevailed. When one planning inspectorate looked like coming out in favour of the Tamar Valley ancient forest eco-system (home to many unique endangered species such as the Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle, the spotted-tail quoll and the giant freshwater crayfish), the government merely sacked them and reappointed someone a little more, er industry-friendly. They've also changed any awkward conservation law that threatened to get in the way of their mates desire to turn trees into hard cash. They did belatedly agree to have an environmental assessment done – handily only after the plant is built and in operation (lock-on to a timber saw anyone?).

The tree-eating monster facility is due to gorge on six million tons of old growth forest a year, kicking out 10m tons of CO2 with 64,00 tons of sea-bound toxic effluent into the bargain. (Those CO2 emissions, by the way, are equivalent to the pollution created in 80 years by the entire population of Tasmania.) On the ground resistance is growing. Protests continue regularly – one recent one in mid-October saw upwards of 5000 people turn out in opposition, occupying roads and blocking every route into the area. Time will tell whether we see any radical splinter groups facing off with the barking mad pulp faction...

For more info see www.wilderness.org.au/campaigns/forests/tasmania/gunns_proposed_pulp_mill/tv_mill_disaster/

* There's a **solidarity demo in London** at the Australian High Commission, the Strand (Charing Cross / Embankment) on November 16th at 3.30pm - aiming to give a frank and strong aussie-style message to politicians (facing an election on Nov 24th). Save Tasmania's Forests! Tel:07809 150344, email: save_tas_sies_forests@yahoo.co.uk

...and finally...

Proof that the bloated American dream is finally collapsing under its own weight. Icon of the oil age, Disneyland is being forced to close a number of rides for a major overhaul this winter. Seats need widening and rides reinforcing to stop them breaking under the groaning weight of yer average grotesquely obese punter.

Designers in the rose-tinted 1960s, imagining a 'nuclear family' era of supamen and women, completely failed to predict the four decades of gorging since and the long queues of wide-arsed lardbuckets waiting patiently (grazing on fatty-snacks while they wait) for their chance of a brief corporately-sanitised rush of adrenalin in their otherwise carbohydrate-rich, spiritually empty lives.

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SchNEWS warns all readers - don't take the bait, it's a trap. Honest!

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