

# England's Killing Fields: Badgers, Power and Protest

## Part 2

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

*Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies*

*And leaves his hold and cackles, groans, and dies.* John Clare - The Badger

The lanes of Somerset and Gloucestershire are being haunted by people from all walks of life but they all have one thing in common - they want to bring a halt to the killing of badgers. It takes dedication to turn out, night after night, being stopped and questioned by police and, on occasion harassed by those carrying out the highly unpopular badger cull. And other people in other parts of Britain are preparing to do the same if culls take place in their area for, as I wrote in [Part 1](#) of this article about the badger culls, the British government seems determined to kill badgers on any grounds - or none.

When the government first proposed setting up two pilot badger culls there were howls of protest from wildlife and conservation bodies, people who loved badgers and not a few who knew the 'science' behind the proposal was, to say the least, selective. A petition asking for the planned culls to be stopped, put on the government website by Queen guitarist Brian May, got more signatures than any other petition on the site.

The reason given for the pilot culls was that they were designed to see if culling by shooting would help prevent TB in cattle, or at least lower the incidence of TB in cattle. And here the government wilfully ignored or misquoted the results from the Krebs study and others in order to justify the killing. The Krebs 10-year study concluded that culling badgers would at the very best lower the incidence of TB among cattle by 25%, would also spread the disease to unaffected areas and yet still leave farmers with the remaining 75% of the problem.

But under the current regime the Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) is both pro-business and pro-landowners of the large estate variety. The environment keeps losing out. And the Tories, headed by Prime Minister David Cameron, are still the party of the rich and landed gentry. They like killing things, whether it's going to war or trashing our wildlife. Their planned culls have the unswerving support of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Brian May [claims](#) the NFU does not really represent the average farmer because only 18% of farmers are actually members. I have failed to verify that figure, but as George Monbiot has [written](#), they certainly act as a lobby group for the large land owners. Before the culls started the NFU tried to get an injunction that would prevent all protest activity while culling was taking place. The High Court refused that but did allow an injunction against some of the possible actions protesters might try to take. Pity no one took out an injunction against the guns to control their behaviour.

On August 27 the cull started in Somerset, followed on September 3 by Gloucester. It soon became apparent that, despite Defra's publicity, the culls were not intended to help prevent the spread of TB. For a start, not one of the culled badgers will be tested to see if they were carrying the disease. Why not? Surely good science would seize this opportunity to discover whether, in two 'hot-spots' for TB in cattle, there is also a high incidence of TB in the badger population? But, as Somerset County Councillor Mike Rigby discovered after persistent questioning, Defra has no interest at all in that. Indeed, he thinks Defra is [frightened](#) of finding out how little TB there might be in the local badgers.

Now they say the culls are just to test whether free-running badgers could be killed 'humanely' by shooting. What is humane? On 14 September we learnt that the government's Chief Vet had [admitted](#) that "There are, however, no definitive criteria for determining humaneness in this context." If they can't tell if a badger has been killed humanely, then the key aim of these culls is obviously rubbish.

Two weeks into the cull in Somerset things started to go wrong. To satisfy the criteria of the cull, over 2000 Somerset badgers have to be shot within the 6-week period. There were [reports](#) that marksmen were struggling to meet their 'kill' target - fewer than 100 badgers had apparently been killed in the first ten days, when they should by then have killed 500. Then a 'wounded badger patrol', having earlier seen marksmen searching for a body, found a badger which had died from a single high-velocity shot - the inference being that it had not been dispatched instantly but managed to crawl away, horribly wounded, to die. Defra was "confident" that the animal had not been killed as part of the cull [because](#) "All badgers killed as part of the pilot culls have been shot cleanly and killed instantly." Huh?

Policing of the cull in Somerset seems to be fairly quiet. Not so in Gloucestershire, with several incidents and arrests reported. In one [incident](#), after being held for 20 hours, having their homes broken into by the police and in one case even being strip searched, computers, phones and cameras taken to "gather evidence", all four protesters arrested for "aggravated trespass" had their charges dropped. This has apparently made them, not intimidated as the police obviously hoped, but more determined to protect badgers than ever.

Others were detained on suspicion of 'aggravated trespass' and were recorded being held by the roadside until 'someone from the NFU can come to deliver an official warning'. The man doing the [recording](#) pointed out that the NFU had no legal right to issue an official warning. Were the police acting for the NFU rather than simply policing, he asked. He was then escorted further down the road by a police Inspector, who said he might cause an 'incident'. When questioned further by the man with the camera, it turned out the policeman was not from the Gloucester police force. Embarrassment all round and the protesters were 'de-arrested'.

Protesters complained they were being shot at. The police at first said it was fireworks and then that the 'shots' were coming from a crow scarer. It turned out the crow scarer was being used by the cull operators solely to frighten the protestors. Gloucester's PCC Martin Surl [criticised](#) the operators' behaviour, saying it "fell short" of what people expected. It fell even shorter when a woman was [assaulted](#) and her car vandalised while monitoring the badger cull. One of her companions was also attacked. The Master of the Ledbury Hunt was alleged to have been among the men doing the assaulting. Now there's a surprise. Hunting deer, foxes and hares with hounds is now illegal but the Hunts still carry on and the Tories

have vowed to repeal the law should they ever have a majority in Parliament. In preparation for that happy future of wildlife-trashing, the famous Eton College is teaching its young charges how to [hunt hares](#) with its own beagle pack. "We are," as Old Etonian David Cameron is so very fond of saying, "all in it together."

Just to demonstrate to everyone the power that the NFU has, the other day it was reported that a woman who works as a government farm inspector and with a professional background in conservation, was [sacked](#) because she had tweeted that she didn't think the cull was an effective way of dealing with bovine TB. The NFU complained to Defra and that was the end of 22 years service in government farming agencies. It is outrageous that the NFU can be allowed to pull strings like that.

And, as we near the end of this awful exercise, news finally comes of the [first arrest](#) under the terms of the NFU injunction. They spend all that money going to the High Court to get their injunction, and this is all they get? There is one more week to go before the cull in Somerset finishes, and two more weeks in Gloucester, where anti-cull activists are currently reporting little or no shooting. Doubtless they will have as few dead badgers after 6 weeks as in Somerset.

And then comes the moment of deafening silence while we all wait for Defra not to release the results of their pilot culls. Although the plans were to kill a total of more than 5000 badgers, in order to see whether these poor harried animals can be shot 'humanely', Defra is arranging that only about 250 carcasses will actually be examined for 'cleanness of kill'. According to Councillor Rigby, the Somerset badgers will be examined by the people who shot them - how unbiased is that?

But when I spoke to Drew Pratten of the Stop the Cull group he said that the Gloucester badgers "will be examined by an independent panel selected by Defra". "Hardly independent then?" I said. "No," was the reply.

This whole thing has been an ill conceived, badly managed and pointless waste of money. But Environment Minister Owen Paterson is determined to carry on. Regardless of the results he [insists](#) he will roll out 10 culls per year across the country. "One of the things I can promise you is, as long as I am around, we will pursue methods to remove TB from our diseased badgers," he said. By killing them all, of course. And my MP Oliver Letwin is looking forward to having a cull in my home patch - in which case I'll be out at night, haunting the lanes and footpaths of Dorset. Mike Rigby sees it differently:

"The cull has been so badly organised and the case for it is so flimsy, I am left wondering whether Defra has deliberately set it up to fail. This would give them the opportunity to say to the NFU "Look we tried. We set up the legal framework for you to cull badgers and you made a hash of it. So it won't be rolled out elsewhere." I wonder this because this shambles cannot possibly be the result of the best efforts of a major Government Department in one of the world's biggest economies."

Sorry Mike, but I disagree. Our current government has been very good indeed at producing shambles, and 'shambles' is exactly the right word to use here. It is the old word for slaughterhouse.

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