

Summary of badger control monitoring during 2016

Natural England summary of self-reported shooting events during the 2016 Badger Control Licences - 'shot at but not retrieved'



Any disease control programme where the aim is to reduce the population size of a wildlife vector through the use of firearms carries an element of risk with regard to animals being 'missed' or 'wounded and lost'. The contractor has control over the condition of his firearm, the ammunition used, the zeroing of the rifle and his shooting technique. Once the trigger is released, external parameters outside of the contractor's control come into play. Misses and woundings can result for a number of reasons, with movement of the target species simultaneously with trigger release being the most common. The reaction of an animal to being shot with expanding ammunition can vary widely and sometimes it can appear that it has been wounded and lost. The age of the animal, its weight, its state of alertness, whether it is aware of human presence can all influence reaction to shot. So even where an animal experiences maximum trauma to vital organs from expanding ammunition, it can run a significant distance before succumbing to irreversible unconsciousness.

During a cull company's first year of control, its contractors will not be experienced in shooting badgers and it is likely that some will miss or in the worst case scenario, wound animals. This can be addressed (and significantly reduced) by learning more about badger behaviour and anticipating the movement of these animals when they are engaged in particular activities.

During the 2016 Badger Control Licences, 14 events of 'wounded and lost' and 34 events of 'missed' were self-reported by contractors. Table 1 presents the number of self-reported 'Shot at but not retrieved' shooting events (categorised into 'missed' and 'wounded & lost') for each of the 10 Areas. It is worth noting that all but one event (a 'missed' event) occurred in new Areas.

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| Area | 'Missed' Events | 'Wounded & lost' Events |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Area 1 - Gloucestershire | 0 | 0 |
| Area 2 - Somerset | 1 | 0 |
| Area 3 - Dorset | 0 | 0 |
| Area 4 - Cornwall | 0 | 0 |
| Area 5 - Cornwall | 0 | 0 |
| Area 6 - Devon | 5 | 3 |
| Area 7 - Devon | 5 | 1 |
| Area 8 - Dorset | 15 | 5 |
| Area 9 - Gloucestershire | 3 | 4 |
| Area 10 - Herefordshire | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 34 | 14 |

Table 1: Self-reported 'shot at but not retrieved' shooting events for all Areas

All of these self-reported events were followed up by a Natural England Monitor, which involved questioning of the contractor. To ascertain the exact circumstances surrounding each event, Monitors gathered evidence on the following:

- **Background info** e.g. firearm/ammo combination, shooting position, sighting device equipment used, rifle zero distance
- **Details of event** e.g. distance of badger from contractor, badger activity immediately prior to shot, angle of badger to contractor, point of aim, audible bullet strike, badger reaction to shot, gait of badger following shot
- **Follow-up action** e.g. was strike site found, evidence at strike site (blood, hair, bone), blood trail, location of cover, location of nearest sett, use of tracking dog

Where it became apparent that a contractor had experienced more than one 'shot at but not retrieved' event on the same or different nights (one contractor in Area 7 and three contractors in Area 8), the Monitor conducted a follow-up compliance monitoring visit.

Based on the information gathered by Monitors (whether verbally or through observations made during follow-up visits), Natural England is satisfied that none of these self-reported 'shot at but not retrieved' shooting events occurred as a result of non-compliance with licence conditions or the Best Practice Guide. Furthermore, Natural England is content that correct follow-up procedures were adopted by contractors to confirm the outcome of each event, and where 'wounded & lost' was the conclusion, sufficient efforts were made to try to locate and recover the animal. The most common reason for a contractor experiencing more than one 'shot at but

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not retrieved' event on a single night was a rifle that had lost its zero through an accidental (undetected) knock to the riflescope.