

Summary of badger control monitoring during 2017

Annex B: Natural England compliance monitoring summary of the 2017 Badger Control Licences

Natural England Report to Defra & the Chief Veterinary Officer



Introduction

Compliance monitoring is a necessary component of any licensing system to determine the level of adherence with licence conditions and best practice. A complete picture of compliance monitoring can only truly be obtained if all components of a particular control technique are observed. To achieve this, multiple visits to some Licensees may be necessary, however, questioning on hypothetical situations can serve as a satisfactory alternative.

On 11 September 2017, the Secretary of State announced that a further 11 areas in England would be licensed to undertake intensive (4-year) culling of badgers in 2017 within the counties of Devon (4), Wiltshire (3), Dorset (1), Somerset (2) and Cheshire (1). With Areas 1 and 2 (West Somerset and West Gloucestershire respectively) also being permitted to undertake Supplementary Badger Control (following a successful 4 years of intensive culling) in 2017, this increased the number of areas undertaking culling to 21. Further information can be found in the following [publication](#).

Natural England, as the independent monitor, was responsible for conducting visits of cage-trapping and controlled shooting contractors to monitor compliance with licence conditions and the Best Practice Guides (BPG). BPGs contain all the relevant information for each of the control techniques to enable those licensed to control badgers to do so humanely, effectively and safely. Monitoring levels reflect the need to be able to determine contractor compliance (and the sensitivity surrounding badger control), while remaining consistent with established Natural England licensing practices. Following the success of the monitoring approach adopted for controlled shooting contractors in 2016, Natural England focused its resources to monitor:

- approximately 10% of controlled shooting contractors within each of the 11 new Areas, and
- by exception in Areas 3-10

The rationale for this was based on the observations from previous years' culling operations that better compliance resulted from an increased understanding and experience of the required approaches and techniques. That said, Natural England has observed high levels of contractor compliance since commencement of this policy.

Monitoring of cage-trapping contractors was conducted at a lower level to reflect the fact that this is a long established technique of controlling badgers. Nonetheless, it was important to check compliance to ensure that humaneness was not compromised.

In line with advice from the CVO, post mortem examinations were to be conducted by exception at the request of Natural England. As it happened, none were requested in 2017.

Methods

Field monitoring

Natural England deployed 13 Monitors to conduct monitoring visits of contractors licensed to carry out controlled shooting of free-ranging badgers and cage-trapping and dispatch of badgers. In addition to assessing compliance with licence conditions and the BPGs, visits of controlled shooting contractors were intended to assess the competency of each contractor team with regards to certain criteria such as firearms handling and safety. Monitors would aim to assess contractor teams against these criteria through observations but in situations where a target animal wasn't located or no shooting event occurred, Monitors would question on the remaining criteria.

Monitors categorised contractor compliance and competency throughout their assessments according to three predefined levels:

- **Level 1** – Demonstrates the ability to execute all indicated tasks without guidance
- **Level 2** – Acceptably demonstrates the ability to execute most of the required tasks with little or no guidance. While sufficiently competent, they could benefit from continued intermittent oversight.
- **Level 3** – Does not acceptably demonstrate the ability to execute the necessary tasks. Requires or would benefit from additional training or supervised practice.

Monitors were equipped with suitable viewing equipment to observe shooting events; remaining close enough to the contractor to enable a clear view of the target species prior to and post shot. Observations that were recorded in the field included numbers of badgers shot at and retrieved (including the number of shots taken for each badger), numbers of badgers shot at but missed and numbers of badgers shot at but wounded and lost.

Where Monitors observed a shooting event, they recorded badger reaction to the shot and assigned this to one of 4 distinct categories namely:

- 'Dropped to the shot',
- 'Reacted to the shot, moved a short distance and dropped',
- 'Reacted to shot, follow-up shot/s taken and dropped' and
- 'Reacted to the shot, moved a short distance, follow-up shot/s taken and dropped to shot/s'.

To ensure that a Monitor could differentiate between a 'miss' and 'a wounded and lost' event, the following information was recorded on the circumstances of the shot:

- Distance of badger when shot taken? – this will have an influence on where the bullet actually strikes relative to the Point of Aim (POA). For example, if the

badger is within 20 metres of the contractor, the bullet strike will be slightly low of the POA on a rifle that is zeroed at 70 metres.

- Any audible bullet strike? – if a bullet is on target, there will be an audible ‘thud’ or ‘plop’. A bullet that is off target will have very little (if any) audible strike when entering an earth backstop.
- Any reaction to the shot? – a badger that has been hit will exhibit some sort of reaction whether this is dropping to the ground, jumping forward or into the air, spinning round.
- Gait of badger when it left the site? – a badger that has been hit will usually exhibit an abnormal gait when leaving the site.
- Any blood, hair or bone at the strike site? – an absence of any of these signs suggests that the shot was a miss.
- Any blood along the exit trail of the badger? – an absence of blood suggests a miss
- Any badgers shot immediately prior to and/or post the miss? – this will give an indication as to zero of the rifle i.e. its accuracy.

Results

Monitoring events

Natural England Monitors conducted a total of 181 visits on cage-trapping and controlled shooting contractors across all 11 new areas during the intensive control period.

Of the 812 cage-trapping and 2043 controlled shooting contractors in Year 1 areas who actively participated in badger control, Natural England conducted compliance monitoring visits on 77 and 104 respectively. Table 1 shows the number of compliance monitoring visits conducted of contractors for each of the control techniques. Percentage figures are based on the number of compliance visits conducted as a proportion of the total contractors active for that method.

Table 1 Percentage and number of compliance monitoring visits conducted for controlled shooting and cage-trapping.

Area	Controlled Shooting Contractors Monitored	Cage Trapping Contractors Monitored
Area 11 – Cheshire	14.04% (8)	5.68% (5)
Area 12 – Devon	10.42% (10)	2.68% (8)
Area 13 – Devon	11.11% (5)	4.32% (6)
Area 14 – Devon	10.87% (5)	5.43% (5)
Area 15 – Devon	12.20% (5)	4.26% (4)
Area 16 – Dorset	16.08% (32)	4.41% (10)
Area 17 – Somerset	12.82% (5)	4.12% (4)
Area 18 – Somerset	13.33% (4)	10.39% (8)
Area 19 – Wiltshire	12.82% (15)	10.69% (14)
Area 20 – Wiltshire	12.82% (10)	6.31% (7)

Area 21 – Wiltshire	7.81% (5)	7.79% (6)
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No significant compliance issues were observed by Monitors during monitoring visits for either control method. There were isolated third party reports regarding non-compliance of controlled shooting contractors but following investigation, neither Natural England nor the Police found any evidence to substantiate these allegations.

Shooting events

Natural England Monitors recorded data on 74 shooting events during the control period across all 11 new areas and the outcome of these is presented in Table 2. Sixty-five badgers were shot at and retrieved, with 50 of these receiving a single shot and 15 receiving multiple shots. Nine badgers were shot at but not retrieved (8 ‘misses’ and 1 ‘wounded and lost’).

Table 2 Number of shooting events recorded by Monitors and their outcomes for all Year 1 areas.

Total number of Shooting Events for Year 1 Areas		74
Number of badgers shot and retrieved		65
i.	Number of badgers receiving single shots	50
ii.	Number of badgers receiving multiple shots	15
Number of badgers shot at but not retrieved		9
i.	Number of badgers shot at but missed	8
ii.	Number of badgers shot but wounded and lost	1

During each monitoring visit, the competency and adherence to the BPG was assessed across eleven criteria for each contractor. The results of these assessments are presented in Table 3. A high percentage of contractors demonstrated the ability to execute all indicated tasks without guidance. In all cases where a Level 1 standard was not demonstrated, contractors were provided with immediate on-site feedback and appropriate guidance from Monitors. The single Level 3 score assigned was a competency-based issue relating to the use of ancillary equipment while the contractor was trying to locate animals to control.

Table 3. Compliance and competency of monitored contractors across all Year 1 areas actively participating in controlled shooting in accordance with the licence and Best Practice Guide requirements

Percentage Breakdown of Competency Levels of Controlled Shooting Contractors observed during Monitoring Visits	
Level 1	98.42%
Level 2	1.53%
Level 3	0.05%

Badgers shot at and retrieved

Table 4 presents results for the outcome of shooting events and shows that of the 65 badgers shot at and retrieved, 51 (78%) dropped instantly to the shot, 2 (3%) moved a short distance after the shot and dropped, 7 (11%) reacted to the shot and then dropped

to a follow-up shot, and 5 (8%) reacted to the shot, moved a short distance and then dropped to a follow-up shot.

Table 4. Monitor observations of badger reaction to shot

Badger Reaction to Shot	65
Dropped to the shot	51
Dropped to shot, moved a short distance and dropped	2
Reacted to shot, follow-up shot/s taken and dropped	7
Reacted to shot, moved a short distance, follow-up shot/s taken and dropped to shot/s	5

There were 15 incidences (23%) over six of the areas where Natural England Monitors recorded multiple (follow-up) shots on badgers from those that were shot at and retrieved. Two of these received 3 shots, with the remainder receiving 2. Follow-up shots were generally precautionary but some were taken because the animal either reacted to the first shot or moved a certain distance immediately after it.

Badgers shot at but not retrieved (SABNR)

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 the wounding of individual animals. The contractor has control over the condition of the firearm, ammunition used, zeroing of the rifle and shooting technique. Once the trigger is released, external parameters outside of the contractor's control come into play. Wounding can result for a number of reasons, with movement of the target species simultaneously with trigger release being the most common.

Of the 74 Shooting Events observed by Natural England Monitors across the 11 new intensive culling areas in, 9 were recorded as 'shot at but not retrieved' (8 'misses' and 1 'wounded and lost'). This equates to 12.2% of all shooting events and is comparable with the number of 'shot at but not retrieved' events recorded during the 2014 (9.52%), 2015 (9.52%) and 2016 (10.7%) control licences.

Self-reported SABNR events

SABNR forms were completed by the Operations Centre by speaking with the contractors involved in the suspected wounded and lost event. The SABNR forms devised by Natural England record information detailing the circumstances surrounding the event such as:

- distance at which a shot was taken
- whether an audible or visible bullet strike took place
- response and condition of the badger post-shot
- previous shooting history of the Contractor
- details of the follow-up procedures carried out

Once completed, this SABNR form was forwarded to the Natural England Lead Adviser for the area concerned who concluded whether the badger was likely to have been wounded and lost or if the shot is likely to have missed the target. If the Lead Adviser had queries about any aspect of the information within the form, they would follow up with the company/contractor as appropriate *e.g. telephone or site visit*.

Table 5 below shows the outcome of all shooting events. Of the 265 SABNR events, Area 16 – Dorset and Area 19 – Wiltshire accounted for approximately half of these with 70 and 52 events respectively. This is not an unexpected observation considering these two areas dispatched considerably more animals than any others. It is important to note that no contractor experienced multiple wounded and lost events. Natural England analysed the data on SABNR events during the control period to inform its selection of contractors to monitor (in addition to the random selection conducted) based on the number of events relative to the number of animals shot and the number of outings. As with previous years, the majority of SABNR events were attributed to Year 1 areas.

Table 5. Outcome of all shooting events

Shooting events	11882
No. Shot at & Retrieved	11615 (97.75%)
No. Shot at but not Retrieved	267 (2.25%)
<i>missed</i>	<i>233 (1.96%)</i>
<i>wounded</i>	<i>34 (0.29%)</i>
SABNR events attributed to Year 1 Areas	231 (86.52%)
SABNR events attributed to Year 2+ Areas	36 (13.48%)

Cage trapping

Monitoring of cage-trapping contractors exceeded that of last year's with 77 visits conducted. Table 7 summarises the levels of compliance and competency of cage-trapping contractors observed by Monitors in the field. As with controlled shooting, cage-trapping contractors exhibited a high level of compliance with licence conditions and the BPG. A small number of anomalies with trapping technique (not compliance related) were observed during monitoring but these were addressed through mentoring support from the relevant companies. In response to the single significant BPG compliance issue recorded this year (where a humanely dispatched badger was left in a cage-trap in situ for a number of hours), the contractor in question was suspended for the remainder of 2017 control period. However, it is important to note that further investigation by Natural England established that this incident posed no biosecurity risk to susceptible livestock.

Table 7. Compliance and competency of monitored contractors across all Year 1 areas actively participating in cage trapping in accordance with the licence and Best Practice Guide requirements

Percentage Breakdown of Competency Levels of Cage Trapping Contractors from Monitoring Visits	
Level 1	94.20%
Level 2	5.80%
Level 3	0.00%