

Badger Vaccination, Castle Woods Nature Reserve, Carmarthenshire Year Three Report (2019)

Report by Dr Lizzie Wilberforce, Conservation Manager
l.wilberforce@welshwildlife.org / 07970 780553

Introduction

The Wildlife Trusts across the UK have been working on the issue of bovine TB and the role of badgers in the disease cycle for many years, as different Governments have put forward proposals for culling badgers as a strategy for controlling the disease. We are very conscious of the hardship that bovine TB (bTB) causes in the farming community and the need to find the right mechanisms to control the disease. However, we believe that the evidence shows a badger cull is not the answer.

We recognise the seriousness of the situation for farmers but the emphasis of all our efforts should be to find a long-term solution. We therefore support badger vaccination, alongside a comprehensive package of cattle measures: better biosecurity, stricter movement controls, improved TB testing and development of a cattle vaccine. As such we strongly support the current Welsh Government programme for supporting badger vaccination and increased cattle controls.

For this reason, the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) decided to invest in a badger vaccination project at its Castle Woods nature reserve, Llandeilo. We felt it was important to be part of the solution, and to play a role in demonstrating that badger vaccination is financially and logistically viable on individual holdings.

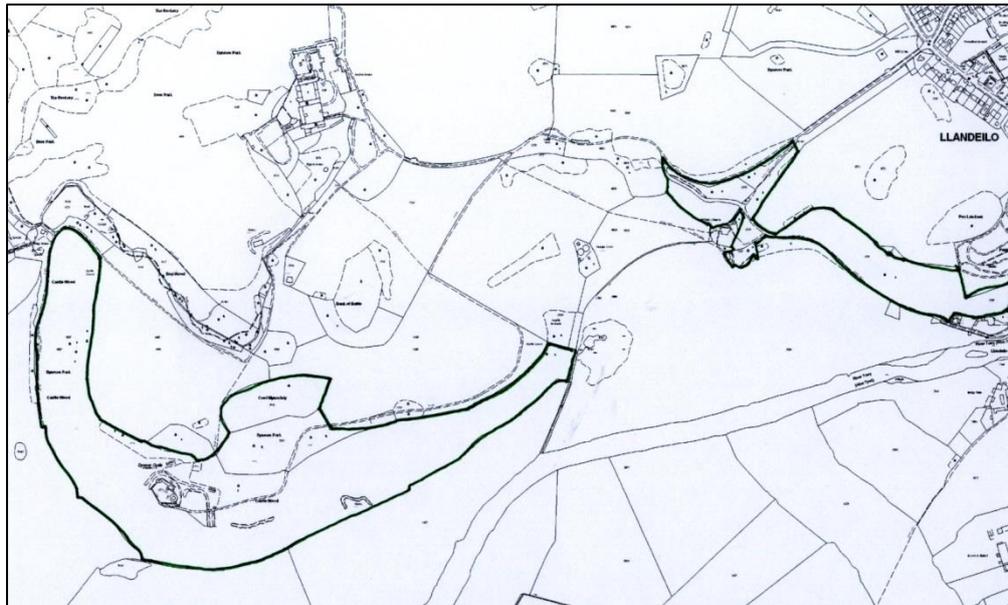
The site: Castle Woods nature reserve

Castle Woods is an ancient, semi-natural woodland lying on the outskirts of Llandeilo in Carmarthenshire. It is a SSSI and National Nature Reserve, and it has been a WTSWW nature reserve since 1979. It is well known for its badger population and many local people watch badgers here. The adjacent parkland of Dinefwr, largely in National Trust (NT) ownership, also has a strong badger population. Both the park and tenanted farmland surrounding Castle Woods is grazed; some areas are sheep grazed but a large number of cattle are also kept on this land, both on the flood plain (by tenant farmers of the NT) and in the park itself, in the form of the NT's rare breed White Park Cattle. TB breakdowns have occurred in local herds.

The Castle Woods nature reserve itself comprises 25 ha of steep hillside broadleaf woodland, providing ideal habitat for setts, some of which are extensive and well established. The surrounding land (not in WTSWW ownership) provides excellent foraging for badgers.



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Map 1: The extent of Castle Woods nature reserve in relation to Llandeilo town

The badger population of Dinefwr

A complete survey for badger signs across WTSWW property was undertaken during 2013-2014, prior to vaccination delivery in 2014 and 2015. This was followed by a two year break due to vaccine shortage and as a result, the setts were re-surveyed in spring 2018 by Carmarthenshire staff Rebecca Killa and Ceri Evans and their volunteer, prior to vaccination in 2018, to ensure the distribution dataset was fully up to date. A further site visit was undertaken by Lizzie Wilberforce in July 2019 to estimate activity at the various setts.

Funding

We have been fortunate to benefit from financial support to undertake the badger vaccination work at Castle Woods. Fifty percent of the project costs are being met by the Welsh Government badger vaccination grant. The rest has been provided by WTSWW core funds, a badger vaccination appeal by WTSWW to its members, and funding from The Green House in Llandeilo and the players of the People's Postcode Lottery.

Vaccination in 2019

We were fortunate to work in partnership with Andrew Crace-Calvert of EcoCon Ltd. to deliver our badger vaccination¹.

¹ EcoCon Limited, Leon Villas, Ash Rd, Lightpill, Stroud, Gloucs GL5 3PD / 01453 767417 / info@ecocon.co.uk

SSSI consent for the work was secured by WTSWW from Natural Resources Wales before work began. All other licences and permissions were secured by EcoCon with support from WTSWW and the National Trust in liaison with local landowners.

This year, the vaccination programme began with a site visit by Lizzie Wilberforce for a preliminary view on the levels of badger activity on 05 July. Traps were set out by Andrew Crace-Calvert with assistance from WTWW from 02 August followed by a period of pre-baiting and four nights of trapping and vaccinating. Vaccination



occurred in the Castle block on the mornings of 12 and 13 August and in the South Lodge / Church block on the mornings of 14 and 15 August.

Left: Andrew vaccinating a badger on 14 August 2019

Trapping was successful, with a total of 14 unique, novel animals caught (plus 5 retraps). This is very slightly lower than the 2018 figures (16 unique animals and 6 retraps). The 14 novel animals were made up of 3 adults and 11 cubs. The total number of animals vaccinated was slightly lower than the prior year and lower again than in 2014/15. Reduced activity observed during the sett survey in July, and followed low numbers in 2018 that were thought to be a result of the very long, hard winter followed by the hot, dry summer having caused naturally high mortality. The number of cubs caught this year, however, is promising for recovery.

Although the overall numbers remain lower across the site than in the earlier years of the project, Andrew Crace-Calvert remains confident that a high proportion of the available animals were caught and vaccinated. This is borne out by the lack of novel animals on the second day of trapping in both parts of the site.



Left: Badger in trap waiting to be vaccinated on 14 August 2019.

We are also pleased that our project now sits within a larger, landscape context with one neighbouring landowner with contiguous land also taking on a badger vaccination project this year.

Finances

The costs of this year's programme are laid out in the table below.

Cost item	2019
EcoCon Ltd.	
To survey, deploy cage traps, pre-bait, set to catch and vaccinate with badger bcg. badgers at the site known as Castle Woods Nature reserve, Dinefwr Estate. £6,380.51 (approved costings for 2018), less £675.31 for vaccines (Supplied by Welsh Government) equals £5,705.20 N.B. Of which only £5,255.00 incurs VAT	£5,876.36
Non-recoverable VAT	£1,175.27
<i>EcoCon Total</i>	£7,051.63
WTSWW	
Staff time prepping (NRW consent, contract writing, walkover surveys etc)	£518.46
Staff time assisting with delivery	£481.72
Travel	£80.80
<i>WTSWW Total</i>	£1,080.98

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all our funders and volunteers who made this work possible. We would also like to thank the National Trust for their support and for allowing us use of their storage facilities.



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