

# Countrydiary



By Robin Page

## Brock opera: Act II

Two pilot culling schemes are under way, but the BBC still won't face the truth: our out-of-control badger population is causing havoc

I have a very strange Diary this week. It starts off with an alliance between the BBC and badgers, and casts doubt on both the BBC's objectivity and its impartiality. For the organisation that is supposed to be our public service broadcaster, this is a very strange state of affairs. My story begins with a member of the Countryside Restoration Trust (CRT), living in Lowestoft, complaining to *Countryfile* that he never sees the CRT on that programme – a valid moan. The series producer of *Countryfile*, Teresa Bogan, then responded via BBC Complaints with a few sentences of self-justification – at which the BBC is extremely good. Her best sentence was: "In reality the combination of stories is determined by a whole range of editorial and logistical considerations including presenter availability, geography and the overall mix of items on the show." Please

note that *Countryfile* is a "show", not a "programme". Then came an angry telephone call from a Devonian CRT farming member: "Did you see *Countryfile* on May 5?" I had to explain that I do not normally watch "the show", and I don't know any real country people or naturalists who watch it. The whole thing is too homogenised and sanitised for me – and then, "You must see it. I have just seen John Craven interview a woman from Ely. They did six items on hedgehogs. The woman blamed the decline of hedgehogs on road casualties and the removal of hedgerows. They made no mention of predation by the booming badger population." So I turned to BBC *Player*. I could hardly believe it. What did Teresa Bogan say earlier? Stories are determined by "logistics, geography and the availability of presenters". Oh yes. So what did that edition



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of *Countryfile* feature? It was a special programme from Cambridgeshire. And where are the CRT's headquarters? Cambridgeshire. And where does the CRT's brilliant tenant farmer Tim Scott live? Cambridgeshire. And did the CRT get a mention in its 20th anniversary year? No, it did not. And one of the items was indeed about a hedgehog release. And was it the CRT's hedgehog release, as described in my last Diary? No it was not, it was another one, at Ely Cathedral. The woman talking about hedgehogs to John Craven

**Too much of a good thing? Robin insists badger predation is harming hedgehogs and other wildlife**

**Did the CRT get a mention in its 20th anniversary year? It did not**

was the excellent Rebecca Willers from the Shpreth Wildlife Park – she too was featured in my last Diary. On the programme she alleged hedgehog decline to road kills and loss of hedgerows, and then it was clear to me that she had been edited. I know that Rebecca believes badgers are serious predators of hedgehogs as she would not let the CRT put hedgehogs on Lark Rise Farm because of the local badgers. I telephoned her. "Yes," Rebecca said: "I mentioned that predation by badgers was an important factor in hedgehog decline several times and it was edited out." So there we have it

– *Countryfile* changing the story to avoid the facts, or so it seems. Did John Craven sit idly by as this was edited out? If he had doubts about the impact of badgers while he was in Ely, he could have walked to Topping and Company – surely one of the best bookshops in Britain – to buy *Badger* by Prof Timothy Popper or *The New Hedgehog Book*, by Prof Pat Morris (Whittet Books). In my view, this is highly selective editing. I will leave it up to readers – is the badger omission simply a matter of "editorial discretion" or is it the Dispeyification of nature? I would love to read your views. In my view it is not objective;

it seems to be little short of annual rights propaganda. What is the BBC hierarchy going to do about this unacceptable situation? Another thing that results from Ireland show that with badger culling, bovine tuberculosis (TB) can be significantly reduced. Cattle on a closed dairy farm in Dorset – "closed" meaning that no cattle have moved on to the farm (it has been closed for 90 years) – have suddenly got TB. Since autumn, more than a third of the herd has been slaughtered. And the strain of TB? A virulent form usually found in Exmoor. This almost certainly means that animal rights campaigners are trapping badgers in the Somerset cull area (illegal) and releasing them in Dorset (illegal) with no concern for the consequences. This also means that healthy Dorset badgers will get TB. It is an act of stupidity and cruelty, as bad as when those misquipped hooligans released milk from milk farms into the general countryside several years ago.

Simple common sense shows that in the unnatural landscapes of Britain it is impossible to get a balance between predator and prey or to control disease without active manipulation of species. Those at the sharp end of farming and conservation know this – but it is those at the top of the tree who make the public statements. It all goes to show how far modern Britain has drifted away from the land, nature and reality. I believe *Countryfile* is encouraging this process.

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## En route to great getaways

In the first of a series on savings, **Emma Lunn** has holidays mapped

Whether planning a trip abroad or staying in the UK, there are plenty of ways to save for (and on) a holiday. Here are six of the best.

**Start saving**  
Saving is far easier if you have a goal so decide where you want to go and print off a picture of your destination to remind you what you're saving for. Smartphone app OrSavelit (orsavelit.com) calculates the average person spends £2,891 on impulse buys annually – enough for a decent holiday. It encourages you to "impulse-save" instead and you can record how much money you save when you forgo a coffee, taxi etc. The app emails a weekly total and suggests you transfer that amount to a savings account.

**Where to go?**  
Do some research about how expensive things will be, taking into account exchange rates and prices. Research by 10tholidays.co.uk found Egypt is currently the most affordable short-haul and South Africa the cheapest long-haul destination.

**DIY versus package**  
Package holidays are easy: you pay one price, and flights, transfers, accommodation and sometimes food are all included. But you can save money using the DIY route and the internet to find cheap flights and accommodation. Websites such as ebookers.com and skyscanner.net are good for comparing and booking flights. If you're after hotel accommodation, check out trivago.com. It compares room deals from all the top travel booking sites such as travelocity.com, hotels.com and booking.com.

**Buy insurance**  
It might seem like an extra expense but travel insurance can save you money in the long run. Without insurance, medical bills abroad can be astronomical. Treatment for a broken leg in the US can set you back an eye-opening £45,000. If you're going to Europe get a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) for each member of your family: this entitles you to the same free state healthcare the locals receive.

**Travel money**  
Never change your money at a UK airport as rates are terrible. Also don't be lured by adverts declaring money is "commission-free" as you're unlikely to get a decent exchange rate. Try travellermoney.com to compare banks and bureaux de change. The site works out exactly how much currency you will receive for a set sum.

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