

Reserve or final solution?

By the time the badgers are safe, they'll be dead

At least seventeen badgers, thirty foxes and five muntjac deer have been killed on a 'nature reserve' within seven weeks of its opening. The animals have not been shot or poisoned. They have been run over.

The reserve is the £40 million A41 Berkhamsted bypass in Hertfordshire, which opened in early September, six months ahead of schedule. The Department of Transport (DoT) has been promoting it as a reserve, quoting the 2.4 per cent of the cost which has been devoted to planting trees and wildflowers and the installation of badger fencing and tunnels.

This is the same road on which the DoT planned an experiment on the effects on badgers of not providing fencing (BBC WILDLIFE May 1993), intending to fence only one half of the road and compare the numbers of road casualties on fenced and unfenced sections.

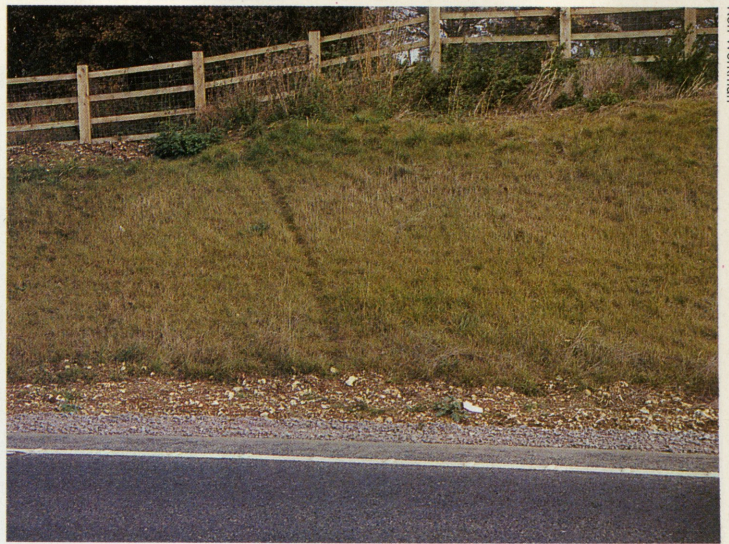
Though a public outcry, led by the Herts and Middlesex Badger Group, forced the DoT to abandon the experiment, the DoT did not guarantee that the rest of the fencing would be installed, as promised in an earlier public inquiry. On the day of opening, less than half of the road had been fenced, and within six weeks, 16

badgers had been mown down.

According to Keith Higby, West Herts area co-ordinator for the badger group, "These are confirmed deaths, and we think there are probably more. Upwards of 30 foxes have also been killed – in the first couple of weeks there were five or six a day. A lot of these deaths have been on the supposed fenced sections, but when we inspected the road a few days before opening, none of the seven setts had proper fencing and there were large gaps in other places for access. A lot of the fencing that has gone in has not been backfilled – one badger which died had just pushed under it."

Since badger fencing, along with lighting and emergency phones, can be installed in the 12-month 'maintenance period' after 'substantial completion', it may be some time before the fencing is complete. But the DoT seems unworried by the possibility that £355,000 of fencing will be completely wasted, because all the badgers will be dead.

A spokesman told BBC WILDLIFE: "We had a long debate with the badger group about how much extra fencing was to go up, and we agreed to another £80,000 worth.



Death run. The badgers go under the wire mesh nailed to the fence, down the slide and onto the motorway. Toll so far: one dead here, lots elsewhere.

With hindsight, if we had been talking earlier, we might have been able to avoid this, but the benefits of having the road opened early outweighed the benefits of having to wait until all the fencing was up. We measure the success of our roads on the benefits that they bring to the human population, and not the animal population." Another DoT representative maintained that only three dead badgers had been reported by its agents.

This merely confirms what the badger group has feared all along. "They are just going through the motions," says Higby, "repeating

that they have spent thousands of pounds, as though money is their only measure of success. We have phoned everyone we can phone, we have spoken to everyone we can speak to, and nothing has been done. They are ignoring us and the wildlife, and we are left wondering if we're going to have any badgers left by Christmas."

TREVOR LAWSON

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ANIMAL TRADE

Hong Kong's horn of plenty

Rhino products still on open sale

Until recently, Hong Kong has maintained that it has no open trade in rhino horn and its derivatives, and that the colony's 1989 ban on trade in rhino products has been successfully enforced by its Agriculture and Fisheries Department. So it came as a shock when, in October, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) revealed that, of 90 Hong Kong pharmacies surveyed in June, 59 were openly selling rhino products such as medicine, hide and horn.

Strangely – and despite claiming to have made hundreds of spot checks on pharmacies – the Agriculture and Fisheries Department (AFD) had made no prosecutions for rhino products since 1989. Yet, a few days after the press

conference and receipt of EIA's information, the department seized two horns and more than 1,000 packets of patent medicine claiming to contain rhino horn.

"We believe the AFD is not competent to enforce the

legislation," said EIA's executive director, Dave Currey. "And why should it be? This is organised crime. We recommend Hong Kong set up an endangered species unit, under the auspices of the police, to track down any crime dealing with endangered species."

The Hong Kong government has vowed to crack down on the trade. The police have been called in to help enforce the wildlife laws; illegal dealers are on the wanted list.

EIA investigators also went to China. In Canton, they were introduced to a man claiming to represent a state-owned Chinese medicine factory. He showed them 300 to 400 horns – roughly equivalent to Zimbabwe's current rhino population. If they wanted to buy the 700 kilos of horn that were not registered with the state, he could

send them to the Hong Kong border under military police escort.

Currey says much of the trade in horn is simply profiteering: retail prices of Asian horn are up to \$60,000 per kilo – five times the price of gold.

In the long term, it may be possible to find replacements for rhino horn (EIA met representatives of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, who said herbal alternatives are available), especially as it is mostly the older generation of Hong Kong's Chinese population who believe in the efficacy of potions based on rhino horns, tiger penises and so forth. The problem is that species such as rhinos cannot wait for Hong Kong to have a change of heart. Law enforcement is needed, now.

MARTIN WILLIAMS
(Hong Kong)

● To support better enforcement of wildlife trade laws in Hong Kong, write to: *Mr Christopher Patten, Governor of Hong Kong, Government House, Hong Kong.*
● For further information on the campaign, contact: *EIA, 2 Pear Tree Court, London EC1R 0DS.*



What they found when they looked. Hong Kong's haul of rhino goods from the shops that weren't supposed to have them.