



August 2010

## **100 Days of the Coalition Government: 100 Days of Failing Animals**

### **Cages for Breeding Pheasants**

#### **History:**

In the final weeks of the Labour Government, a new Code of Practice for 'game bird' production (made under the Animal Welfare Act 2006) was issued. This effectively banned the use of battery cages (known as raised laying cages) for breeding pheasants. The Code was the product of years of evidence-gathering and public consultation, and the cage ban even had the support of Britain's leading pro-shooting lobby group, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC).

Hundreds of thousands of pheasants and partridges are incarcerated for the whole of their productive lives (around two years) in battery cages. Pheasants are confined in groups of around eight females and one male. Animal Aid's covert filming reveals that the birds suffer a high incidence of emaciation, feather-loss, and back and head wounds. Many of the pheasants lunge repeatedly at their cage roofs in a forlorn attempt to escape. The resulting damage to their heads is known in the trade as 'scalping'.

The Labour government's Code of Practice also outlawed so-called 'enriched' cages, which, typically, have a green plastic 'curtain' set towards the back of the cage for privacy and a piece of dowel suspended on two bricks for perching. Animal Aid has several times filmed the 'enriched' version and we can report that they are just as bleak and oppressive.

#### **Today:**

Within weeks of taking office, the Conservative's Hunting and Shooting Minister (who, incongruously is also the Animal Welfare Minister), Jim Paice, withdrew the Code and replaced it with a watered-down version, which allowed the cages to remain, albeit in their so-called 'enriched' form.

It appears that there is no reversing the decision, and pheasants will now be forced to endure battery confinement for the whole of their productive lives.

### **Vets at Markets**

#### **History:**

Following Animal Aid's powerful undercover work at 36 markets, the newly-incumbent Labour government introduced a *strategy for the Protection of Animal Welfare at Livestock Markets* in September 1998. While falling short of the of recognising the magnitude of the welfare problems, the *Strategy* did contain some positive features, including the commitment that State Veterinary Service (now Animal Health) vets would be present at 25 per cent of all sale days at every market.

With millions of animals passing through markets, having a vet on hand is imperative to ensure that sick animals are not forced to travel further.

**Now:** On July 20<sup>th</sup> this year, a Local Veterinary Inspector reported that he had had his contract with Defra terminated overnight, and that he would be asked to do only a quarterly appraisal of the market in future. It seems that this is the case right across the country.

Trading Standards Officers (TSOs) are currently present at markets but they are not qualified veterinary officers and they rely on the vets to assess whether an animal is fit to be at market or to travel. When vets are not present, TSOs come under significant pressure from buyers and auctioneers to sell animals, even when their health and welfare is in question. A vet's word is final, and without them at markets, we predict that animals will suffer even more than they currently do during the stressful and potentially dangerous sales process.

In fact, the situation for animals at markets has worsened already. Local animal welfare campaigners write: 'Since vet coverage has ended there have been three livestock market days at Ashford and at each market there have been animals that I have asked Trading Standards to look at to assess health and to consider if the animals were fit to be at market and fit to travel. In each case it was decided that it was not possible to call a vet out all the way from Reigate as the condition of the sheep did not appear to be serious enough to warrant this, but if there had been a vet on duty they would have asked for the animals to be examined.'

'On week one there were some very thin sheep and one with a huge hernia in the same pen.'

'On week two there was a ram with a huge facial abscess and in another pen a ewe with a sewn up prolapse which a farmer identified for TS [Trading Standards]. I spoke with the redundant vet ... and he said the ram would have been in some degree of pain and the carcass would have probably been condemned and the ram should not have been in the market.'

'Today there were some very thin ewes who sold for a little more than the thin ewes on week one. In the same pen was a ewe that had a huge body. On sighting her I straight away asked the opinion of three different farmers who all said she was unwell, she was bloated, "her insides is wrong" stated one, another stated "she's not good" and another added that she was in pain as her internal organs would be enlarged. I quickly informed TS. There was not any external symptoms other than her shape and size but the buyers were aware and of her condition and this was later reflected in the price. The ewe remained standing all day, TS thought this a sign of well-being but I did point out to them that as her body was so swollen (her feet / legs were obviously uncomfortable as she kept shuffling) she may not have actually been able to lay down.'

We asked Defra's Senior Veterinary Consultant, David Pritchard, about the recent changes. He replied:

'Out of more than 113,000 visits to markets in 2009 (AH [Animal Health] plus Local Authority) less than 2% were found to have infringements of the relevant welfare

legislation. Under these circumstances, and given the increasing pressure on all Government bodies in terms of the best use of public resources, AH has recently reduced the frequency of routine surveillance visits to markets... They will be further reviewing the level and frequency of visits to markets, bearing in mind the degree to which there is regular Local Authority presence, and also taking into account the feedback they receive as a result of the reduced frequency of visits.'

On 11<sup>th</sup> August, we heard still more disastrous news. The number of Trading Standards Officers and/or the frequency of their market visits may also be reduced in the near future.

## **Badger Cull**

### **History:**

In July 2008, the Defra Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, announced that no badger cull would take place in England. Farmers have long been demanding a cull as they say it will help control TB in cattle. Benn's decision was not only a popular one (a Defra public consultation on the issue received submissions from 47,000 respondents, ninety-five per cent of whom opposed a cull) but also a scientifically-valid one.

The government-appointed Independent Scientific Group announced in June 2007 - following nearly a decade of research - that killing badgers would not significantly reduce bovine TB and could make matters worse. It also declared that TB probably first spreads from cattle to badgers, where it remains stable, provided the badgers are undisturbed. Research demonstrated that culling causes massive disturbance and has the effect of increasing the incidence and spread of the disease.

Some 30,000 badgers have been destroyed since 1975, in a failed attempt to curb the disease. And despite virtually exterminating badgers from four counties in Ireland, a huge TB problem remains in each of those areas.

The farming industry has long resisted the idea that its own intensive rearing, breeding and transport practices are at the heart of the bovine TB problem. In fact, exhaustive research demonstrates that cattle movements 'substantially and consistently outweigh'<sup>1</sup> all other factors in spreading bovine TB.

Instead of sanctioning a cull, Mr Benn announced a programme of badger vaccination, which would take place in six areas in England.

A cull in Wales was also halted in July 2010 when The Court of Appeal ruled that the projected nine per cent reduction in TB did not amount to a 'substantial' reduction of the disease, as called for by law.

### **Today:**

Animal Welfare Minister, Jim Paice, wasted little time in overturning these policies. In June 2010, the vaccination programme was cut to the point of meaninglessness, with just one limited area of Gloucestershire being targeted instead of the intended six areas.<sup>2</sup>

Before the election, Paice signalled his intention to implement a badger cull 'almost immediately'.<sup>3</sup> *Farmers Guardian* reported: 'Farming Minister Jim Paice has spent

much of the past year developing a badger cull strategy for England in partnership with the industry in preparation for a change of policy once the Tories assumed power.<sup>4</sup>

However, Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, signalled her intention to wait for the outcome of the Welsh cull – a cull which now looks unlikely to proceed.

The Conservative-led government has, instead, announced yet another consultation, even though a policy decision has already been taken. On July 25<sup>th</sup>, a Wales Online article stated: ‘Farming Minister Jim Paice announced a consultation would be undertaken this autumn, but said it would almost certainly recommend a cull.’<sup>5</sup>

The stated aim of this government is to start a cull of badgers in the summer of 2011.<sup>6</sup>

## **Hunting**

### **History:**

Hunting with hounds was banned in 2004. This brought a halt to legalised fox, deer and hare hunting, as well as an end to hare coursing. Despite the ban, many hunts reportedly continue to hunt. If discovered killing, a common defence is that it was an accident.

The Hunting Act is not perfect (although more than 100 people have already been convicted under the statute<sup>7</sup>) but it is an historic ban that brought hunting to the same legal position as other blood sports such as bear baiting and dog fighting. In order to protect animals, it needs strengthening and enforcing.

### **Today:**

In Opposition, the Conservatives stated plainly that they intended to hold a free vote in order to try to repeal the Hunting Act quickly after getting into power.<sup>8</sup> However, the free vote has not yet materialised, almost certainly because a victory is so unsure.

It is expected, therefore, that there will be a preliminary vote to ask whether a vote on repeal should go ahead. If that first vote responds ‘yes’, it is expected the repeal vote will quickly follow.

## **Circuses**

### **History:**

In the dying days of the Labour government, Defra’s public consultation on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses found that 94.5 per cent of respondents supported a ban. A ban on wild animals has long had overwhelming support and yet it remains legal to use them to do tricks, to transport them round the country, and to incarcerate them for long periods when not ‘training’ or ‘entertaining’.

Undercover investigations have found that training methods can be violent and stressful. For example, a 2009 filmed investigation of the Great British Circus by Animal Defenders International showed animals being hit in the face, being kept chained and barely able to move for up to 11 hours a day, and displaying disturbed, abnormal behaviour. Acts of violence included elephants being hit in the face with a

metal hook, a broom and a pitchfork, a worker cruelly twisting an elephant's tail, and the frightened animals retreating and crying out when struck or hooked.<sup>9</sup>

**Today:**

In July 2010, the former Animal Welfare Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick, tabled an EDM calling for a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.<sup>10</sup> The Coalition government is yet to make an announcement on this issue.

**Slaughterhouse Prosecutions**

**History:** Since January 2009, Animal Aid has filmed secretly inside seven randomly selected slaughterhouses across seven English counties. We filmed legal breaches and terrible – and sometimes deliberately-inflicted – suffering in six out of seven abattoirs.

The many distressing scenes we filmed included:

- Animals being kicked in the face, slapped, stamped on, picked up by fleeces and ears, and forcibly thrown across or into stunning pens
- Animals screaming and struggling to escape
- Animals going to the knife without adequate stunning
- Animals stunned and then allowed to come round again
- Electric tongs used maliciously on the snout, ear, tail, body and open mouths of pigs, resulting in the animals being given painful electric shocks
- Pigs being jabbed viciously in the face with the electric tongs
- Ewes being stunned while a lamb suckled them
- A sheep too sick to stand – or possibly already dead – being brought to slaughter in a wheelbarrow
- A pig bleeding after being deliberately hit in the face with a shackle hook
- Improperly stunned animals being stood on to keep them still while shackles were attached
- Pigs falling from the shackle line into the blood pit and then being dragged through groups of live pigs
- Animals being decapitated before the appropriate statutory time had elapsed, and while the animals may still have been alive
- Long periods elapsing between electrical stunning and 'sticking' (throat cutting), which increases the likelihood that animals regain consciousness

As a result of our investigations, nine slaughterhouse workers have been suspended or have had their slaughter licences revoked, and legal action has either been taken or is underway against all nine, as well as against four slaughterhouse operators. All these prosecutions were brought by Defra while Labour was in power.

**Today:**

At Animal Aid's first meeting with senior Defra officials following the election of the Coalition government, we were told that Defra will not bring any more prosecutions based on our evidence, even though it is the Department's responsibility to take enforcement action. It appears that the Conservative-led government has taken a different tack to its predecessor and prefers not to prosecute, even when breaches are recorded clearly.

## **Farming Deregulation**

### **History:**

Animal Aid, alongside many other groups, has filmed inside Britain's farms – intensive, free-range and Freedom Food – over many years and has found suffering in almost all we have visited. In our experience, the worst of the suffering is experienced by pigs and chickens in intensive farms. The farming of dairy cows is becoming increasingly intensive and even sheep and goats are kept in 'zero grazing' systems (i.e. where they are never or rarely allowed outdoors).

The local authority Trading Standards Officers are responsible for enforcing legislation relating to the health and welfare of animals on farms. They inspect farms to prevent and eradicate disease outbreaks and to ensure the welfare of animals. However, Trading Standards Officers are not veterinarians, and visits to farms are not routine but are based on 'risk analysis criteria'.<sup>11</sup>

In Animal Aid's decades of experience, prosecutions, even of those who have caused the worst suffering, are rare.

There must be more active monitoring and stronger enforcement to prevent animal suffering on a huge scale.

### **Today:**

In July, the government set up a task force to deregulate the farming industry. According to journalist and environmentalist George Monbiot, the Chair of this task force 'is the former director general of the National Farmers' Union. His deputy is a senior NFU official. The rest of the task force is composed of another farmer, three corporate executives, a county council official and ... well this is where it gets interesting. The eighth member, the government tells us, is "a Nuffield Scholar who has been involved with developing an animal welfare scheme". In reality he is yet another farmer, who supplies milk to Sainsbury's. This selective citation suggests dishonesty on the part of Caroline Spelman's food and farming department. The last member is the head of public affairs at the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. This group purports to protect wildlife, but it runs fox snaring courses and gives advice on setting spring traps to catch smaller predators. There is no one on the task force representing rural workers, and no one outside the industry seeking to defend the landscape or the wider environment, water quality or animal welfare.'

Asking the industry to police itself is a worrying backward step for animal welfare.

## **Household Product Testing**

One positive policy has emerged from the Coalition government: it has pledged to ban the use of animals to test finished household products.<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, the numbers used to test household products have been small when compared with the total number of animals tested upon. In 2002, 1242 were reported to have been used,<sup>13</sup> while in 2009, none were used.<sup>14</sup>

The use of animals to test the ingredients of household products remains unaffected.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmenvfru/905/905iiw25.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/2010/06/24/tbbadger-vaccine/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/latest-news/jim-paice-appointed-as-farm-minister/31937.article>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/livestock/livestock-news/government-commits-to-badger-cull-despite-selman-reservations/32056.article>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2010/07/25/badger-cull-looks-likely-in-england-says-paice-91466-26924459/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2010/07/25/badger-cull-looks-likely-in-england-says-paice-91466-26924459/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.politics.co.uk/news/animal-welfare/labour-on-hunting-ban-offensive-\\$1361116.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/news/animal-welfare/labour-on-hunting-ban-offensive-$1361116.htm)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/apr/29/hunting-ban-conservatives-daniel-kawczynski>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.captiveanimals.org/news/2009/gbc\\_video.html](http://www.captiveanimals.org/news/2009/gbc_video.html)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.ad-international.org/animals\\_in\\_entertainment/go.php?id=1887&ssi=10](http://www.ad-international.org/animals_in_entertainment/go.php?id=1887&ssi=10)

<sup>11</sup>

<http://www.derby.gov.uk/Business/TradingStandards/Trading+Standards+Inspection+Team.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/press-releases/latest-statistics-animals>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.boyd-group.demon.co.uk/householdproducts.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.drhadwentrust.org/smartweb/latest-news/news-and-views/post/4-animal-testing-statistics-drop-by-1>