

MARK CARWARDINE



On the wild thoughts that won't let him sleep. This month:

Badgered about the cull

Repeat after me: “Badgers are over-running the country, they’re destroying farmers’ livelihoods and they must be culled.”

This contemptible fairy tale was central to the Government’s underhand campaign to force the two pilot badger culls on an unsuspecting public. It worked on the basis that if MPs and the NFU repeated the mantra often enough, it would become gospel. That it was all rubbish didn’t matter, as long as it took a foothold in the public consciousness.

There was also the policy of portraying those opposed to the cull as either ‘animal lovers’ – implying woolly-headed bunny-huggers – or ‘animal activists’, suggesting rent-a-crowd mobs riding roughshod over the countryside, shouting obscenities.

In truth, most people opposed to the cull are intelligent, law-abiding citizens, not to mention most scientists and conservationists and many farmers. They are not an insignificant minority.

Then there is the issue of news management. The Government revealed as little as possible, fearing that too much knowledge might shed unwanted light on the whole fiasco. It pretended that the cull was a simple, cure-all, science-led policy – even

while scientists said that culling isn’t the solution.

Rather than welcoming debate, press officers fed small amounts of (mis)information to an unquestioning media. We were told, for example, that “there are too many badgers, and they are killing our hedgehogs” without any mention of the hedgehog’s demise being largely the result of human activity.

“Badgers don’t have predators” was another falsehood, which ignored the



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50,000 or so that are killed on our roads every year.

What scares me is that, if the Government’s dirty-tricks campaign succeeds and the cull is extended next year, then a huge proportion of Britain’s badgers will be wiped out inhumanely, while farmers will be no better off. It’s utterly scandalous.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, writer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter.