




Maximum security



Rob Rawlins shares his experience of installing badger-proof fencing.

Like most alpaca breeders, there are a lot of improvements that I wanted to carry out on our alpaca farm. However, having attended the first of the BAS TB Awareness meetings in January, I decided only one project was really needed. I was determined to do everything I could to prevent our alpacas from contracting bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

We had already decided to operate our alpaca farm as a 'closed herd' in the foreseeable future, a decision that has proved to be very fruitful as awareness of bTB rises in the industry. We had decided not to show our alpacas at halter shows in 2010, and not to travel our herdsires for mobile matings. All these decisions would help prevent the herd contracting bTB from alpaca to alpaca contact. We also have a strict biosecurity

regime in place involving disinfectant matting, footwear baths and visitor precautions.

However, we needed to ensure that we did not infect the herd from the wildlife vector – a far more complicated task. I started to research badger-proof fencing and quickly realised there were two solutions, the first of which was electric fencing. This needed to be specialised for the purpose and although it could be installed on our farm, it would be a high maintenance solution because the hedgerows would cause short-circuit issues close to the ground during the hedge growing season.

The electric fencing solution would work for some breeders, but we wanted something more permanent, something low maintenance and long lasting. We decided to install permanent, specifically manufactured badger-proof netting.

Taking action

I know that some people think that installing badger proof fencing is over the top. I know some people thought it was a reaction of panic to a situation that didn't call for such radical action. Not so actually – we



Top: During construction, the netting is trenched into the soil 450mm deep and 200mm facing away from the property.

Bottom: Having back-filled the trench, the badger-proof netting is buried underground. The top outer wire is electrified making climbing impossible.



“We were probably sitting on a time bomb of bTB.”

were probably sitting on a time bomb of bTB. We have local badger setts and the badgers were coming onto our land and walking amongst our alpacas every night. They would use our paddocks as latrines and would dig up areas looking for worms under the alpaca dung piles.

But this was nothing new, they had been doing this every night for the Hi10 years we have been breeding alpacas on our land. Our local badgers were clean of bTB – they had to be or surely we would have contracted the disease long ago?

But when we heard the news that a cattle herd less than 10 miles away had gone down with bTB, contracted from a local badger sett, we decided it was time for action. Bovine TB was getting closer to home in the wildlife vector and was starting to be a direct threat to our alpacas.

Quality solution

We employed the services of an expert in this field – Antony Griffiths of AJG Fencing Contractors. Not only is Antony a fencing expert, his parents own Toad Hall Alpacas in Worcestershire so he had a sympathetic understanding of our position and how the threat should be approached.

Antony is a great believer in quality fencing products. In his opinion only Tornado’s specific badger-proof fencing would be good enough to do the job properly. Manufactured in the UK, it is made of high tensile steel and very good quality.

To complement this quality fencing material, we needed to address the access for wildlife at gateways to our land. New meshed galvanised gates were purchased and fitted above concrete thresholds.

At more inaccessible points around our land, rather than concreting, railway sleepers were dug under the gateways to prevent badgers from entering.

The fencing process involved using a mini-digger to dig a trench around our entire perimeter. The old post and rail fencing was removed and the new fencing was erected with the badger-proof netting travelling down into the trench.

For the netting to be most effective, the wire needed to travel down 450mm below ground level and then turn out away from the land, being protected for at least 200mm. Having installed the fencing this way, it left a finished fence height of 4ft. The trench was back filled, covering the netting underground and leaving a





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tidy finished appearance.

However, as we know, badgers are capable of climbing fencing. To finish the job, Antony fitted an electrified single run of wire, connected to a mains operated Electric Shepherd energiser, to the outside top of the fence. On the inside at the top was another non-electrified single run of wire to protect the alpacas from getting shocked by the outer wire.

Where there's a will

We thought that our new fencing would be a secure solution. However we did not allow for the tenacity of the badger. Never underestimate the single minded approach it has to maintaining control of its patch.

It took the badgers one night to get on to our land. Just one night! The only weak spot in the fencing was at one of the stud paddock field shelters. Due to the layout of that part of the paddock, fencing behind the shelter had been impossible so Antony had fenced up to each side of it. The badgers simply burrowed under the shelter and onto our land. Although annoying, this was easily remedied by manually finishing the back of the shelter with badger-proof netting. Thankfully our farm is now a

badger free zone.

And it's not just badgers that are kept out. We no longer have a problem with foxes or dogs. Twice during this last winter, we had dogs enter our land – one actually bit one of our herdsires and the other attacked one of our bantams. In fact, even rabbits cannot get in through the tiny holes in the netting. About three days after the installation process, we found a young rabbit had been fenced inside our land. He tried for days to get back to his warren but he couldn't get out.

Badger-proof fencing is not a cheap solution. We are fortunate that our land is not too large, so it made the project achievable for us. The feeling of reassurance it gives cannot be measured. I know we cannot prevent avian TB or rodent TB entering our land. But we have been able to prevent the wildlife that can carry bovine TB from entering our property. For us it was quite simply a no brainer.

Any alpaca breeders interested in this solution for eradicating badgers from their land are very welcome to visit our farm and see how this project has been completed. Contact Rob or Les at Wellground Alpaca Stud on 01380 830431.