

You will most likely be aware of the current Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) epidemic in cattle in Northern Ireland. The eradication programme for bTB costs and estimated £40 million per year, with an average of 1000 cattle culled each month. But despite these large-scale eradication efforts, bTB remains a huge problem for the NI farming sector.

I would like to raise your awareness of a research project being carried out into bovine Tuberculosis in deer in NI. This project, being conducted by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), aims to gain a better understanding of the extent of bTB in red, sika and fallow deer.

We hope this work will have several benefits, including;

- a clearer picture of the role deer may play in the current TB epidemic in cattle
- an improved understanding of the biosecurity implications of processing and consuming venison
- a greater appreciation of the animal health and welfare consequences of this disease
- the production of novel scientific knowledge

We are asking members of the deer stalking community to provide the heads (with antlers removed) of shot animals for TB testing. Samples will be collected from a convenient location by the DAERA Wildlife Unit. For anyone aware of the DAERA fox survey, sample collection will work in much the same way, and use the same telephone numbers (07767271431 or 08290765333).

This survey is set to run from 1 November 2019 to 31 March 2020. Further details on how to contribute will be provided in the near future.

In the meantime, we would be very grateful if any interested parties would provide us with a small amount of information to aid in the set-up of project logistics. If possible, we would ask for a name, contact email/number, and the DVO you are likely to be operating in (see map below). All information will be treated in the strictest confidence, and in line with GDPR regulations.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Siobhán Porter at siobhan.porter@afbini.gov.uk or 02890519495.

Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) boundaries

