Aerial spraying against OPM first forecast in April. GI got underway in early May. Within hours it was headline news in The Guardian and Daily Telegraph. Micron Sprayers confirmed aerial application would be carried out by a Robinson Helicopter equipped with Microair AU700 atomisers.

The target is the 10-hectare Herridges and Broom Copse near Pangbourne (West Berkshire) to be sprayed twice with Bacillus thuringiensis subsp. kurstaki. Stewart Snape at Forestry Commission (FC) said “We know there could be OPM in the woodland environment because we found a nest last year.”

Dr Martin Warren, Chief Executive of the charity ‘Butterfly Conservation’ said: “Blanket aerial spraying of a designated wildlife site sets a very bad precedent and is an extremely crude control mechanism – the approach is akin to using a sledgehammer to crack a nut”. We believe a far better method would be to conduct a detailed survey of the concomitant nests and remove them individually as they have done in other areas.”

The charity is concerned for rare butterflies in this woodland including silver-studded blue (Plebejus argus) and white admiral (Limenitis camilla), as well as the purple emperor (Apatura iris) known to be on sites nearby.

Early May featured strong winds and falling temperatures slowing oak re-emergence even more. Calm conditions for accurate deposition of droplets are required. And 40-60 per cent leaf expansion, to ensure sufficiently good leaf coverage and a lethal dose of BT insecticide through larval ingestion.

Wind turbulence and insufficient tree canopy cover increase chances of droplets landing on non-target plants. Day to day and honeyguide both common woodland and hedgerow plants are the food plants of silver washed brimstone and white admiral, respectively. Pangbourne appears a strange choice of place to begin aerial bombardment with insecticide. After three years of ground spraying only three nests were found last year. One surprised observer told Greenkeeper International: “If FC wanted maximum impact against OPM they could have closed down Richmond Park for a day to treat the area’s high OPM infestation.”

This would clearly assist sites nearby. OPM has been successfully controlled on Richmond Golf Course (GI January 2012) but threats from female moths flying in to lay their eggs remain.

Dr Tony Hobbert

FAREWELL JANE JONES

Jane Jones, who left her position as Regional Administrator for the South West & Wales on 31 May, was presented with a series of gifts by everyone at BIGGA House to thank her for eight and a half years of sterling service. She’s intending to remain in the golf and greenkeeping industry. Everyone wishes her well and hopefully she will continue to attend events with the industry and keep in touch with many of the members, particularly in her Region.

TORO/LELY MATCH

B&MO triumphed 4-1 over Kent in the annual Toro/Lely House counties football final at Upson Park, home of West Ham United.

Kent Section secretary and part-time goalkeeper (?) Rob Holland reports: “It was truly a game of two halves. B&MO scored four quick fire goals between the 12th and 20th minutes despite the heroics of the cat-like keeper.

“We scored a penalty in the second half and relentlessly pressed to narrow the scoreline. Unfortunately it soon ran out. Well done to Ben Adams, Russ Bain and Adam White who were superb in Kent’s rearguard.

“Many thanks to B&MO for a great game played in a very friendly spirit. Thanks especially to Larry Pearsman and Tomas Griffiths for your generosity which was very much appreciated. Thanks too to West Ham and particularly Head Groundsman Shaun O’Brien for the quality of the pitch. Finally thanks to Kev Morris for arranging everything from organising the players, transport, afternoon refreshments, post match speeches and evening beverages back at Redlibbits. Thanks for the great company and another amazing day guys.”

ST ANNES OLD LINKS SOARS THANKS TO DRONE

For most Golf Clubs, like most businesses, marketing has become a key component of success and longevity. So when the St Annes Old Links (SAOL) Course Manager, the Professional and a club member chatted over a beer at the Club prizegiving, none of them thought that marketing and greenkeeping at the club would take such an innovative step forward so quickly.

Positioned within yards of Lancashire’s Irish Sea coastline, the club prides itself on having one of the best maintained true Links golf courses in the UK, but maintaining this standard comes at a significant cost. Two of the key individuals responsible for ensuring the viability of the Club are the Club Pro Daniel Webster and the Course Manager Stuart Hogg.

It was whilst discussing the need to market the Club to a wider audience and bringing in visiting parties that Peter Barrett, a club member, suggested an innovative idea. Peter’s son Ali had been developing a helicopter drone which he had used for filming extreme sports. So why not use this same technology to film the course and allow prospective visitors to see the quality and standard of the greens and fairways before they visit?

Stuart then suggested it was not only useful for marketing, but would also enable him, as Course Manager, to gain a more holistic view of the course using the aerial perspective to track progress of the course over time and to help the development of future short and long term improvement projects.

Working with Daniel and Stuart, a plan was put into place to film the course during the Easter holidays. The whole course has now been filmed and the results can be seen at the SAOL website www.stannesisoldlinks.com. SAOL is one of the first golf clubs in the UK to have a full aerial video of the complete course available on their website.

The results speak for themselves. As Club Captain, John Gallagher said: “I am extremely impressed by the end results. Utilising this innovative technology enables us to showcase our wonderful course, providing an enhanced service offering to our visitors and guests. Equally as important it provides valuable information to our Course Manager in terms of course maintenance and development.”

Work is ongoing to refine the videography techniques and Ali and Peter have now set up a new business - www.heliphoto.biz – to further promote the use of lightweight, high tech drones for aerial filming of golf courses and other sporting events and venues.