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Take sensible precautions with pests

I would like to make a few points in response to last month's article entitled, 'Pesssst! Have you heard?'

Let me begin by saying that we fully recognise that golf courses have to deal with pests. That point is not in doubt. However, we should approach this sensitive issue with a degree of balance.

Firstly, it is vital that we correctly identify the pest and come up with solutions for specific pests. In drawing together those solutions, it is important to define what the parameters are for managing each pest.

For example, I was concerned that badgers were rather superficially mentioned in an article alongside rabbits, without recognising the huge differences in legislation and protection which applies to each species. Just to be clear, badgers are a protected species under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the 1992 Protection of Badgers Act. Under this legislation it is illegal to wilfully kill, injure or take any badger or attempt to do any of these things. It is also an offence to intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any part of a badger sett.

The article could also have put the damage caused by different pest species into context. For all the golf courses which will have badgers on or around them, how many actually experience unacceptable levels of damage in sensitive parts of the course? I appreciate they can cause damage, but it is perhaps wrong to give the impression that if there are badgers, damage is automatic, and that management requires total invertebrate control.

It was suggested that damage to turf could be controlled through the 'removal' of their food supply. This is perhaps unrealistic and could be a very expensive exercise - attempting to remove the huge range of invertebrates found on a golf course. Furthermore, badgers are true omnivores, feeding on a wide range of plants, invertebrates and other mammals. They even feed on young rabbits during the Spring. Spraying, on the scale required, would not only be costly, it would have knock on effects for other non target species, many of which may be beneficial to turf health.

In a time when golf is attempting to demonstrate concern about the environment and undo some of the bad press it has been getting, I think we should be carefully assessing whether pesticides, and particularly insecticides, are required at any given time, and if a greenkeeper feels they are necessary, how can their use be minimised. Clearly, setting a threshold for pest damage is one way in which applications can be minimised and potentially needless expense saved. Spraying on the basis that something might happen is not a good generalisation to make.

Yes we need to control pests on golf courses, but let us make sure that management of pests is sensible, based on sound understanding of each pest. Above all, control should be effective and efficient. If this is the case pest control can be carried out without wasting money, and without needlessly damaging the environment.

Jonathan Smith
Golf Course Wildlife Adviser

Bio research: There's a lot of it going on

In your article in the June edition on Aventis it was mentioned that Aventis is the only company in the UK conducting research into new products for sports turf.

Actually there is a thriving commercial research community combining UK companies and university and college research.

Symbio, which incidentally is celebrating its 10th anniversary in August, was

the first in Europe to research, develop and launch a range of biological solutions for sports turf management. We have a link with the University of Surrey, and two full time research staff on product development.

Symbio was the first company to introduce the concept of adding specially chosen bacteria and fungi for improved nutrient uptake. We then developed and launched biotech solutions for that

reduction and black layer treatment. In 1997, in research sponsored by Symbio with the University of London, we identified the link which shows how increased mycorrhizal colonisation can reduce the incidence of poa annua.

Our ongoing research is focussed on the use of biotechnology in integrated disease and pest control.

Martin Ward, Symbio

Fungicide application rates. How much?

I am sending this message to correct a couple of passages published in the talking heads article July edition. The article read that I applied 200 litres of fungicide a month which has been reduced to 70 litres a month. The message I tried to convey was that in my first two years at Downfield we used 200 litres of fungicide based on 20 litres per application, however, over the peri-

od of the last two and a half years we have reduced this to 70 litres in total. At Downfield we have worked very hard to reduce our chemical use through sensible cultural practices, and I feel that the decrease in our use of fungicides has highlighted our sound management.

In the case of the St. Marks fly, I mentioned that it had the characteristics of a disease at first with severe

browning of the turf but this was isolated to small areas of tees and fairways. In fact, it is an insect that eats away at the roots of the grass plant, eventually leaving it discoloured. I hope these corrections will keep environmentalists and salesmen at bay.

Paul Murphy, Course Manager,
Downfield GC, Dundee, Via email