

TALKING

Six of the country's top men give their views on pests (Leatherjackets, chafers, worms, rabbits and moles) and how they combat them

Pests (Leatherjackets, chafers, worms, rabbits and moles)

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



Name: Iain MacLeod
Course: Tain GC, Rosshire
Region: Scotland
Course Type: Links
Staff: Head Greenkeeper plus four



Name: Pat Murphy
Course: Shipley GC
Region: Northern
Course Type: Parkland/heathland
Staff: Course Manager, plus six, plus two gardeners



Name: Neil Whitaker
Course: Arkley GC, Herts
Region: Midland
Course Type: Mixture of parkland and heathland
Staff: Course Manager, plus two (nine holes)



Name: Billy Mitchell
Course: Perranporth Golf Club, Newquay, Cornwall
Course Type: Duneland, links type
Region: South West and South Wales
Staff: Head greenkeeper plus three (365 acres)



Name: Billy McMillan
Course: Mannings Heath, Horsham, Sussex
Region: South East
Course type: Parkland (36 holes)
Staff: Course Manager, plus two Head Greenkeepers, eight greenkeepers plus mechanic (winter), plus three more staff (summer)



Name: Joe Findlay
Course: Royal Portrush Golf Club, Co Antrim
Region: Northern Ireland
Course type: Links
Staff: Head Greenkeeper plus 13, plus five part-timers in summer (36 holes, nine-hole pitch and putt course)

1

Which pests give you the most problem?

Leatherjackets and moles. It used to be rabbits, but we employ someone to shoot them now and whereas we used to get as many as 30-40 in one night now we only see the odd one.

Moles are the main problem, but I also get damage from rabbits, badgers and deer.

Rabbits, closely followed by moles. We also have worms and a few leatherjackets in addition to quite a few foxes.

Rabbits and moles are the biggest problems and we get more moles if we have worms about.

Worms are by far the most debilitating problem on our courses and I see them as a major concern for many people in years to come if, as seems possible, winters get wetter. We don't get a lot of leatherjackets here.

Leatherjackets are the only real problem. There are no sign of worms because of our sandy soil.

HEADS

How do you identify them early?

We see the cranefly on the wing and also laying on fairways and greens and the presence of various birds, including the hooded crow soon let us know they are about.

Molehills give you a clear indication straight away, and there are scrapes and droppings from rabbits, badgers dig up the grass and deer eat parts of trees.

Rabbits are easily identified because of scrapes and droppings. Birds pecking are a sign of leatherjackets and sometimes worms when the birds turn divots over.

Rabbits are no problem to identify as there are scrapes and holes dug round bunkers. Molehills clearly indicate their presence.

Worm casting in early autumn and winter.

If you wait to see signs of damage it is too late. Crane-flies lay eggs in August and September. In late October or early November I spray with Chlorpyrifos insecticide to kill the grubs and also do a lot of aerating and also use a hydrojet

How do they affect play?

Not really at all. We try to nip things in the bud when possible. We didn't aerate in August, September and October this year so that there wouldn't be ready-made holes for craneflies to lay eggs. Instead we tine and verticut in November.

They don't affect play at all because damage is not done to the fine turf. Moles are usually in semi-rough and rough on our course.

Holes in bunkers are the usual problem concerning rabbits and divots lifted by birds, in addition to not being replaced by golfers, are a nuisance. But I would say that play isn't affected to any great extent.

Bunkers have to be raked regularly because of rabbits digging. We had nests built into the bunkers last year. But generally speaking they don't affect play that much.

The casting of worms can destroy any fine sward and detracts from the quality of the playing surface for members and visitors as you can quickly get a lot of mud. Some players tee up on worm casts!

Not at all. I maintain a very tight sward which is an excellent defence against the crane-fly. I never let it get to the stage of affecting play.

What measures can you take to prevent them?

We spray for leatherjackets in November and, if there is a major infestation, in March as well. Because we are on sandy soil we get few problems with worms but greens are sprayed to deal with what few we have.

Moles need water every four hours, so I suppose you could say cut off the supply! In dry weather they go down and you never see them and they come up looking for worms when it's wet.

Spraying with pesticides, repellants and retardants. We have someone coming in once a fortnight to shoot rabbits. Many years ago I used lead arsenic and later chlordane to control worms but there is nothing as effective as these nowadays. The present suppressants are costly and give minimal control. On a previous course we electrified fences to deter badgers.

I use Scuttle, a good animal repellant and I also have mole traps in addition to putting down Phostoxin. We have a resident badger which does a bit of digging but we tolerate him.

Short of keeping the playing surface dry and free from any leaf and grass litter, there is nothing more I can do. I could go on about low fertility, light and air, but that is a long story.

The most important thing is to have a good deep-rooted system and tight sward to withstand pests. We haven't used fungicides for the last three years, only pesticides.

What measures do you take to tackle them if they have hit?

We spray if leatherjackets have struck and if the signs are severe, with damage to the root system, we overseed or re turf. Worm casts are an ideal seed bed for weeds. Cutting fairways can be more difficult if there are worm casts about.

We trap moles, net rabbits but don't touch badgers, which are protected, or deer. I am a nature lover so I don't like to see shooting on the course. I am a bit worried that we may struggle to find something to deal with worms one of these days. There hasn't been anything as good as chlordane, which is now banned of course.

Rabbits are a major problem and it is a losing battle with them. We use conventional methods such as shooting and gassing.

We try to eradicate pests by conventional methods, shooting rabbits and gassing the burrows. But we will never beat them.

We restrict worm casts by chemical control as late in the season as possible in an effort to avoid multiple applications of chemicals on our courses. But always remember the old saying 'as custodians of the land we have to co-exist with nature.'

I spray with the appropriate pesticide if there is a sign of bird activity. Rabbits are a minor problem. We had a foot square of fairway damaged by a rabbit, but his time will come! And you may be interested to know there are no moles in Ireland.