

Unwanted Visitors

Mark Rees gets up close and personal with some of the biggest pests found on the golf course.

Creating and maintaining the high standard expected of greens and fairways by players is hard enough with the unpredictable British weather. However, another natural problem that causes as much damage can be controlled - pests.

An ongoing pest control plan can help protect the welfare of staff and players by reducing the risk of transferred disease and save money by preventing damage to machinery, buildings, seed stocks, vegetation, fairways, and greens. Rabbit burrows and molehills are unsightly and they adversely affect the reputation of the club.



Aside from the health risk, both mice and rats can cause damage by gnawing. Brown Rats have been known to gnaw through breezeblocks, so electrical wires and control cables on machinery offer little resistance. To give some idea of how quickly a rat infestation can become established, the Brown Rat reaches sexual maturity within 10-12 weeks and can have up to six litters a year of seven to eight young.

Signs of their presence are droppings, gnaw marks and smears where their fur has left grease marks on surfaces they have brushed against. Mice can reproduce themselves even more quickly and cause similar damage.

Keeping rats and mice out of buildings, especially where there is a food source, is the best way of control. Rats are able to squeeze through quite narrow gaps - half grown animals can get through a 12mm gap, and mice only need 6mm. Keeping the building and its surroundings free from food and debris will also make the area less attractive to rodents.



Once rodents become established, traps or rodenticides can be used. Rodenticides are applied in the form of bait, usually whole or broken cereal grains. The bait should be placed in rodent burrows, or in tamper resistant boxes near their runs and in-and-around infested buildings. Although modern rodenticides are generally of a low hazard, the use of a bait box helps to protect the bait from children and domestic animals, as well as protecting it from the elements.

Moles are also a serious nuisance on golf courses. The hills of earth they create are unsightly and cause damage to grass cutting machinery, plant growth and create additional unwanted hazards for golfers. Left untreated the problems caused by moles will soon get worse; moles are solitary creatures and have litters containing up to seven young, which then disperse to the nearby area.

Treating moles has traditionally been by trapping, which is only effective with a single mole when it first appears, but a well established community requires the services of a professional. Phostoxin, is a specialist product consisting of tablets, which, when exposed to moisture in the air, or soil, release the highly toxic gas Phosphine, gasing the moles underground. It must only be used by trained personnel and the near vicinity must be kept clear of people until the gas has dispersed, usually at least 48 hours.

Rabbits are as obvious as moles to spot, from their droppings, scrapes and burrows. Although they feed primarily on grassland, they will damage trees by eating seedlings, distort growth by damaging shoots, as well as checking tree growth by stripping bark.

They normally are dealt with in a similar way to moles, there burrow systems being gased during the winter months.



A distinct dislike caused by a fear of being stung means wasps cause considerable irritation to both staff and players. Wasp control should be left to a professional as tackling a nest without the necessary protective equipment can lead to multiple stings, and an unsuccessful attempt to eradicate the nest.

Other insects are found in and around golf courses, some of which cause problems, but many are benign. Again, a professional pest control company will be able to identify the species involved and advise you which control measures will be appropriate. Where Chafers or 'Maybugs' cause a problem, they are best treated by an agricultural pest control specialist who has the NPTC spraying certificate.

Greenkeepers can carry out some pest control by taking preventive measures such as rodent proofing buildings or containers where seed and machinery are stored, and practising good housekeeping. Greenkeepers should also take care to carefully follow the label instructions of any substances that they employ for pest control.

However, to save time and ensure a thorough job, employing a professional pest controller to carry out an ongoing programme of pest prevention and control is worth considering. But make sure you contract the right company.

Check that they have fully trained and qualified surveyors and technicians who can demonstrate recognised Health and Safety procedures, and have the appropriate public liability insurance. They should also be a member of The British Pest Control Association (BPCA), and provide detailed, clear and concise reporting and recommendations of their pest control plan.

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