

Pest Control Information - Moles

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About Moles

Moles are solitary in their habits and live almost entirely underground in a tunnel system that may cover an area of 400-2000sq. metres.

They feed mainly on earthworms but also on various other invertebrates including slugs and insect larvae. Much of the prey is caught when it falls into the tunnel system that acts as a kind of pitfall trap. The Mole patrols the tunnel system almost continuously, with activity periods of 4½ hours alternating with 3½ hours rest. One of the periods of activity is just after sunrise and another just before sunset.

Description

The Cylindrical body is 12-16cm long from nose to tip of tail and weighs 70-110gms. There is very little external difference between the sexes. The Mole is covered with black velvety hair that can set in any direction. It is well adapted for burrowing with large spade-like forefeet turned permanently outwards for digging. The eyes are very small and hidden among the fur, but well capable of detecting light. There are no external ear flaps. The senses of touch and hearing are well developed but smell and sight are less important.

Distribution

The Mole is abundant throughout mainland Britain but is absent from Ireland and some off shore islands. It is found wherever there are suitable soils for tunnelling, but it tends to avoid shallow or stony soil, waterlogged or very acid soil. It is most abundant in permanent grassland and deciduous woodland but can be found in playing fields, parks, cemeteries, golf courses and private gardens.

Significance

The most important type of damage is due to Mole hills, which are not only unsightly on amenity and sporting grassland but result in unevenness of the surface and deterioration of the sward by providing a seed bed for weeds. They are particularly unwelcome on the expensive turf of golf greens and bowling greens. Mole hills can also cause damage to mowing machinery. In agriculture the inclusion of soil from Mole hills in silage grass can result in spoilt unpalatable silage and is a possible source of the disease Listeriosis in sheep fed on silage. Damage can occur in arable crops and gardens when Moles burrow under seedlings and plants resulting in wilting and death. Mole tunnelling activity can disturb archaeological strata. Underground security systems can be interrupted or triggered by Mole activity.

Life Cycle

The life expectancy of a mole is approximately three years due to its extremely high metabolic rate. Its inability to store fat or food, requires the mole to remain active year round. As the extremes of winter or summer arrive, the food sources burrow deeper into the ground. The mole simply follows the food. It is during these times that the homeowner sometimes gets a reprieve from the mole's destructive surface activity. Moles eat about 33% to 100% of their body weight each day.

What to look out for

The most obvious sign of the presence of Moles is the appearance of Mole hills on the surface of the ground. These consist of heaps of loose soil, usually sufficient in volume to fill a five litre bucket. The main way to check whether Moles are still present in an area is to level the hills, e.g. by harrowing, and check after two to three days for formation of new hills. This indicates the area where control action should be concentrated. There are two types of tunnel: deep tunnels 5-20cm below the soil surface, the soil from which is pushed out onto the surface as Mole hills; and surface runs where the soil is pushed up to form a ridge on the surface.

Control

The two main methods of control – trapping and gassing, both rely on finding well used, runs. These runs are often located running parallel to hedges, directly underneath fences and alongside paths. They can also be found in the open by probing the ground between two freshly made Mole hills with a blunt stick or metal “Mole bar”; when the run is pierced a sudden ‘give’ is felt. A number of Aluminium Phosphide generating products are available for gassing Moles in their burrows. They can be used in a number of situations where poisoning is not permitted. The dosage and application rates prescribed on the product labels must be adhered to. It is essential that the person carrying out the gassing is competent and suitably trained. Trapping moles is another alternative where gassing is inappropriate. Gassing of Badgers and Foxes is illegal, care must be taken that gassing of moles does not affect Badgers, Foxes or any other species that might be at risk. **If in doubt, do not gas.**

Safety

All pesticides are applied by our qualified and experienced staff to ensure the safety of the public and to minimise damage to the environment.

