

THE MOLE-HILL GAZETTE



Occasional writings on managing moles in the genus *Scapanus*

By Dave Pehling, WSU Extension Snohomish Co. 04/07 Vol. 1, No. 2

“In the Spring a young mole’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love”.

Actually, our little friends have gotten long past this stage by April and the females should have young in their cozy underground nest by now or they may have even already been weaned and kicked out! There is still much to learn about moles....

As you may know, breeding in our latitude is generally considered to take place between February and March, with the young being born 4-6 weeks later. Our Townsend’s moles average 2.9 per litter while the more widely distributed Pacific mole averages closer to 4 young. The naked, blind young are nursed for about another month and then kicked out to find their own way in the world. Mortality is high during this dispersal phase. Juveniles travel 14 to 925 yards before establishing their own territories.

In this issue, I’ll describe some of the testing I’m doing with some of the common mole control products available in local garden stores.

Before we get into that, though, here is an update on what happened to the two bills that would have once again legalized mole trapping in Washington.

H.B. 1400, which would have excluded common mole and gopher traps from the definition of "body-gripping trap.", never made it out of the House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources. You can read about this bill at

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?year=2007&bill=1400>

S.B. 5722, which was very similar, fared much better, making it all the way to the second reading before Senator Jacobsen attempted to amend the bill in a way which would have repealed I-713 in its entirety. With that, the rules committee sent it to their “X” files, never to be heard from again. You can read about this bill at

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=5722&year=2007> Without a great deal more public pressure, I’m afraid we are going to be stuck with the trapping ban for many years to come.

And that leaves us with the many and varied legal control devices, baits and repellents. In this issue, we will talk about some of the available chemical controls. *Trade names*

*have been used to simplify information; no endorsement is intended. Be **SURE** to read and follow all label directions when using pesticides/repellents!*

Beginning in the first week in January, I began monitoring two mole runs for activity using standard probing methods. This involves using an iron rod or dowel to break open the roofs of the moles' tunnels in several places throughout their territories. By checking the openings, we can easily tell if a mole has passed by as they will invariably plug any openings.

One mole run is in Snohomish, the other is in Everett. It is assumed that the species at both sites is S. townsendii as this is the most common lowland species. I AM attempting live trapping using a variety of home-made live traps so I can positively ID the species and I'll report on that later.

Throughout the month of January, I probed both territories every couple days (whenever the soil was not frozen) to make sure the runs were being consistently used.

Mole Repellent Test

In February, I began a limited test of two mole-control products. At the Everett site, I began applying a promising granular mole-repellent that contains castor oil with a clay (Fullers' earth) binder. There are a half-dozen or so brands registered in Washington but the active ingredients are the same in most of them. One brand (Repellex) also contains garlic oil. The brand at my local "Lowe's", which I tested, is "Sweeney's Mole and Gopher Repellent".

Throughout February, I made several applications to the active parts of the mole's territory. The directions say to spread evenly and water in but they also give you the option of applying directly to the deep tunnels. That is the method I used, as I don't have a spreader. Throughout the test there was no change in activity. The mole kept returning to the application holes and plugging them up! Seems to me that a repellent should repel them???? Perhaps applying the product several times a week for several months would have some effect but moles are very inconsistent in their traveling habits (activity in any given area probably depends largely upon the abundance of earthworms) so it would be impossible to tell if the change in activity was the product finally getting too much for the mole to bear or whether Mr. Mole just decided to move on to "greener (wormier?) pastures".

Mole Bait Test

At the Snohomish site, I began a limited test of one of the newest mole baits available, "Talpirid". This bait uses artificial 'gummy worms' as the carrier. The active ingredient is Bromethalin, a nerve poison. Other brands (Motomco Mole Killer and Tomcat Mole Killer) are available locally but they are all essentially the same, as far as I can tell.

The folks at Bell Labs, who make "Talpirid", were nice enough to send me two sample

boxes of their product. I really appreciate that, as the stuff sells for around \$40 a box! To be fair, it must be said that a single bait is supposed to be sufficient to kill a mole so, in theory, each box should have sufficient bait to kill many moles. The information included said that the bait had been thoroughly tested on our western moles and was proven effective.

After probing the target area to find the mole runs that were in daily use, I applied several of the artificial worms, according to label directions, and carefully closed the holes to minimize disturbance of the tunnels. I staked each of the baits to the floor of their respective tunnel with slender bamboo skewers to make sure I could recover the baits for inspection. Over the course of several weeks I returned to the site many times to check the condition of the baits. In every instance I could find no sign of feeding, though the baits were consistently walked over, buried, pressed into the tunnel walls or just pushed out of the run. On two of the baits, I tried to enhance the attractiveness by smearing earthworms on them but they were still pushed aside and buried by the mole. In the end, all of the baits slowly dissolved away into the soil and the mole continues to inhabit the runs.

Well, that's all for this issue. Stay tuned for our next installment where we will entertain the question..."Are there ANY traps we can legally use in Washington State????"

*Mole-fully yours,
dave.....*



WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local WSU Extension office. Alternate formats of our educational materials are available upon request for persons with disabilities.