Wildlife casualties in silage crops

There has long been recognition of the hazards to wildlife wherever the cutting of crops for silage or hay coincides with the nesting and rearing of game birds and the perinatal period of roe and fallow deer.

In 1987 Laurent-Perrier Champagne announced a special award, additional to their annual Award for Wild Game Conservation, for a new device or technique which would reduce the deaths and injuries so caused. Forty ideas were submitted of which five were field tested, mainly for effectiveness in reducing accidents to roe kids. Three of the techniques aimed to deter the deer from entering the crops just prior to cutting, and two depended upon flushing animals that were within the field.

The results of the trials of the five devices are summarized in a booklet which should be read by all land-owners, deer managers, farmers or game-keepers on whose area accidents of this nature occur. Economic losses can be considerable, quite apart from the welfare considerations. A tractor driver high up in his cab, perhaps listening to the radio, can be unaware of a fawn whose limb has been severed.

The first prize went to Dalgety plc for their synthesis of a constituent of lion dung, which is applied as a chemical fence round the field. Extensive trials in various countries have been very successful, repelling deer and other large herbivores from vulnerable crops. However, the substance cannot be marketed in the UK until the legally required toxicity tests have been completed.

The second award was for readily available bright, rotating, amber hazard lights which are fitted with a solar cell so they switch on at dusk and off at dawn. During three trials no roe kids were killed whereas during a previous similar period over the same area some thirty-three dead kids were found.

The third deterrent, consisted of accoustic bleepers which emit a loud bleep at intervals of twelve minutes. These were switched on a night or two before cutting was to take place and left on until work began. The other joint third prize was for a pair of staggered mechanical flushing bars attached to a tractor and weighted with bells. These are widely used in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries, with a considerable reduction in the number of wildlife casualties. An electrified flushing bar which has been developed to a working model stage but which requires further research and refinement was given the fifth prize.

There was no prize for the cheapest suggestion of all — human hair hung in bags; this has apparently had some success in repelling deer from favoured feeding areas, rose gardens, market gardens!

Game and Wildlife Casualties in Silage Crops: Some new life-saving techniques (1991) 20 Pp. Published by the Advisory Committee of the Laurent-Perrier Champagne Award for Wild Game Conservation, 66-68 Chapel Street, Marlow, Bucks SL7 1DE. Price £2.50 post free.