

Forensic entomology helps to convict gamekeeper of snaring offences

A gamekeeper has been convicted of snaring offences which left a badger caught on an electric fence by its head. George Allan, from Skene in Aberdeenshire, was fined £600 when he appeared for sentencing at Aberdeen Sheriff Court recently. The 61-year-old had previously pleaded guilty to setting a snare, failing to inspect it within 24 hours and failing to fit identity tags. An investigation into the badger's death was carried out by the Scottish SPCA and the Natural History Museum. An undercover Scottish SPCA inspector said: "The badger 's head was partially suspended from a live electric fence and would have been subjected to a continuous electric current. With assistance of the Natural History Museum in London, forensic entomology was carried out on the fly larvae found on the dead badger. The scientist was able to establish the age of the larvae and determined that the badger had remained in the snare for longer than 24 hours. This is the first time forensic entomology has been used in a Scottish SPCA investigation and we thank PAW Forensic Working Group for their expertise and financial assistance."

Poisoning of hares

Our member in Ireland Mike Rendle recently received a message concerning three adult hares found dead at a yew tree over a period of two weeks. The sender said this was the first time this had happened and it appeared that the hares had eaten the yew berries.

Mike says: "The person who sent me this report has speculated (probably correctly) that they died from yew poisoning. He suggested they had eaten berries but I think eating the bark is more likely and more lethal. The flesh of the berry is not poisonous although the much smaller seeds are. Birds can eat the berries because the seeds pass through. Hares do eat bark so that 's my preferred theory at the moment. Although I only have this brief report to go on, I don' t think there's anything more sinister going on. I was wondering if you have come across anything like this before. Thanks and best wishes."

Hare casualties in USA

Our member in California Janet Geren says:

"Oh it is so sad. I rescued many that were run over and injured severely by construction equipment, farm equipment, even power grass mowers. I used to run out to fields and ask the farmers to please walk the fields before mowing. Some would, some wouldn't . Construction workers on large projects would bring the leverets to the animal shelter, parents killed because they were paralysed with fear and died being run down by heavy equipment. When will this end?"

Detection of leverets in crops by drone mounted thermal imaging

We now have a JDI Phantom 3 drone and looking for a suitable tablet to fit to the controller unit. The consensus of opinion is that this needs to provide as large a display as possible. The drone will then be ready for a trial flight in a large field free of obstructions which our member Alison Johansen has kindly made available to us. We will then need to think about a Seek thermal imaging camera onto which an Android phone will be connected via a USB connection. This combination will then need to be firmly attached to the drone. Thus, two people will be needed to operate the drone – one to fly it and the other to interpret the thermal display beamed back to base.

In both its unmodified and modified configurations the drone has many possible applications such as roof inspection of listed buildings, so it should be possible for it to earn its cost and act as a fundraiser for SWAFH. We will, however, need insurance cover and one of us will have to attend an approved training course.

Someone who says it can't be done shouldn' t interrupt the person doing it.

Proverb from Ancient China

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