WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
SNOHOMISH COUNTY EXTENSION

THE MOLE-HILL GAZETTE

Occasional writings on managing moles in the genus *Scapanus*
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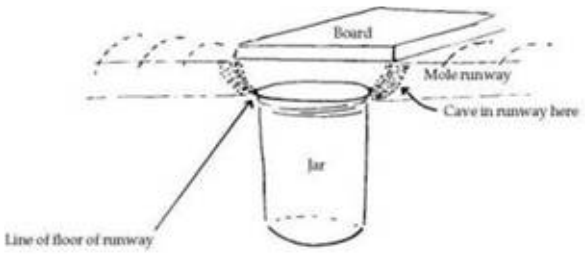
Mole Control – Why not traps?

As everyone SHOULD know by now, in Washington State it is a gross misdemeanor to use ANY trap that holds an animal's body in **any** way**.** This includes all commercially available mole and gopher traps in the U.S, including those mentioned in old WSU publications on mole management. You may still legally purchase these devices but you may not use them as animal traps. The **ONLY** body-gripping traps one can legally use are **"common rat and mouse traps".** Those body-grippers may still be used because they were specially exempted in Initiative 713. You CAN get a special permit from WDFW to use a few other kinds of 'body-gripping' traps but none of the allowed traps will work for moles. For info on I-713, which outlawed mole-trap use, have a look at http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/i-713.htm (no longer available as of 2011 - alternative link http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/moles.html#legal)

So, are there any traps that we CAN we use to control these pesky critters? Well, any sort of live trap is still legal and you can actually purchase a couple different kinds from "across the pond". I've found them at http://www.pestfree.co.uk/moles.htm and several other U.K. sites. A more "boxy" model was once available at http://www.harrodgreenhouse.com/p_pest.html

These are all simple tubes or cages with one-way swinging doors. According to the available literature, models similar to those on the former web site have been used in British Columbia to catch Pacific moles. I've built several of these myself out of PVC pipe and, in several attempts, have not been able to capture any of my own Pacific moles. I suspect that the purchased traps would be too small for our large Townsend's moles.

Another option you can try is "pitfall trapping". This entails burying a large can or other container in the bottom of an active tunnel in such a way as to encourage the mole to fall into it. This image is from "Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage" at



http://icwdm.org/handbook/mammals/Moles.asp and shows the accepted method of setting this kind of mole trap. Mole-pitfalls are, apparently, somewhat effective on eastern and European mole species, as they are often mentioned in the literature about controlling those animals. Our western moles must be a lot smarter, though, as I have not had any success in several attempts.

There is a good description about how to pitfall-trap moles at https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/420/420-201/420-201.html

I have tried pitfall-trapping several times on both Pacific and Townsend's moles with a notable lack of success. I usually use large coffee cans (3 lb. Size) for my pitfalls. A regular post-hole digger works very well for placing the pitfalls. My moles either fill them up with soil or go around them. I've also tried making a "trap door" for these pitfalls using a PVC pipe with part of the bottom cut out. By stuffing the pipe firmly enough with soil so that the dirt does not fall out of the bottom of the pipe and placing it across the top of the pitfall so that the ends align with the mole tunnel, I figured, for sure, the mole would try to dig through the pipe and fall into my can when he came to the "trap door" section. My moles simply tunneled around the pipe. Maybe I'll try a larger diameter pipe or different style of trap door in the future….

If you are handy with tools, there are a few "fancy" live-mole traps you can build. These have been used in past years in scientific research on our elusive tunnelers. The newest design was published in *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, Vol. 46, No. 1. (Jan., 1982), pp. 249-252. "**A New Live Trap for Moles"** by Ingrid M. Jensen. This design involves building the entire trap from scratch and is designed for setting in shallow tunnels specifically for the eastern hairy-tailed moles, (*Parascalops breweri*). It would probably also work for our western species but, according to the article, takes about 20 hours to build even if you know what you're doing so I've not yet made one.

A simpler design, developed by A.W. Moore, (see. **"A live mole trap"**. J. Mammal. 1940 21:223-225) adapts the "Victor Mole Trap" (a lethal harpoon-trap) to power a box-type live-trap. This design is easier to build but trapping success is reported to be low. As with the trap mentioned above, a success rate of about 30% is reported. For practical control, one would want a trap that is at least 75% successful.

I'm building a live trap of my own design this winter and will report on progress in the next "Gazette"

Mole-fully yours,

dave……