



By **NICK LAVIGUEUR**
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MOLE trapper John Sykes has never been busier.

The former landscape gardener is out from dawn until dusk seven days-a-week trying to root out the elusive underground vermin.

John started his unusual business when some of his clients had their gardens destroyed.

Just two years later his "Mole Patrol" service is now covering hundreds of acres of Yorkshire and Lancashire farm land.

His business, Colne Valley Pest Control, is also employed by Kirklees Council and numerous sports clubs and hotels.

And he said an "epidemic" of moles this winter meant he was

'Epidemic' means John hunting 300 per week

having to trap as many as 300 per week.

"It's getting more and more of a problem," he said.

"Moles are causing so much grief for landowners at the moment.

"When most animals are hibernating the moles are at their most active.

"They're constantly digging and feeding and the cold winter has driven their food source deeper down so they're digging more."

John said moles were a particular problem for farmers as their digging

could cause damage to machinery.

They also contaminate bails of hay by tunnelling up underneath them, causing massive financial loss.

John is licensed by the British Traditional Mole Catchers Register and said there was a certain knack to catching the critters.

"There's an art to setting the traps but everything I do is humane. I don't use any poisons or anything like that."

But for all the hard graft John said his unusual job was always a good conversation starter.

"People are always very interested," he said.

The mole truth

- The only mole present in the British Isles is the *Talpa Europea* or European Mole.
- They have sharp teeth similar to a cat and are typically 12 to 18 cm long and weigh 60 to 130 grams.
- Moles do not hibernate and they live off insects including worms.
- Their eyes are small and completely hidden in their fur to give the appearance of being blind but they can differentiate between



- light and dark.
- Thanks to the specialised structure of its bones and

muscles, the mole can project a lateral force when it is digging equivalent to 32 times its body weight.

● Moles build several layers of tunnels, shallow short lived ones and deeper tunnels used for breeding and feeding. Their nests are made of leaves or grass.

● Moles are excellent swimmers and in times of flood will swim to higher ground.