

# Lasers could be next tool in pest battle

► Would help reduce use of rodenticides

By Ben Briggs

LASERS could soon play a wider role in the battle against on-farm pests and reduce the need for rodenticide applications, if findings from a new study prove positive.

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) monitor farm at Auchnerran, Logie Coldstone, in the Cairngorms National Park, is trialling the use of class 3B lasers in the prevention of a range of wildlife which pose a threat to crops, ranging from wild geese to rabbits.

The farm has a large rabbit population, which is leading to huge warrens appearing in hillsides and embankments, seriously undermining the ground in the process.

## Beam

David Parish, a senior scientist in Scottish lowland research for GWCT, said the lasers, which are manufactured by Dutch company Bird Control Group, project a green beam of light which has proved effective in scaring birds away from crops.

He said the challenge now was to see what else they could deter, and added: "We are looking at whether it works with mammals. We are



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DAVID PARISH

facing a situation in which the EU wants rodenticide use to reduce, so a number of organisations are trying these things out.

“Our main focus is on rabbits and keeping them out of grassland, but we are also looking at use on deer and also otters, the latter of which predate on wading bird chicks.”

The project at Auchnerran is in conjunction with Liverpool John Moores University, but, currently, the green lasers have only produced a 25 per cent response rate in rabbits on the farm, leading

researchers to test out whether other colours of laser could be more effective. No licence is needed for the lasers and they can cost up to £5,000 for the full unit, according to Mr Parish.

Additionally, GWCT has to provide sets of goggles in the fields where the lasers are placed in case any passing walker wants to look at the system. This is a heightened problem in Scotland where right to roam means the units cannot simply be placed in fields away from footpaths.



The laser system is currently being trialled.