

Black hawk up

We have noted many times before how inventive people are when faced with a pest problem. This certainly rings true when you hear about the steps taken by Essex arable farmer, John Galloway, to protect his crops from attack by birds. After much trial and error, the Scare'm self launching bird scaring kite was developed.

With all the changes in the General Licensing arrangements, bird scaring kites are increasingly finding their way into urban pest management. Here John Galloway describes how he got Scare'm off the ground.

I've always been interested in flying. In the 1980s I was one of those nutters you saw jumping off cliffs and mountain tops on a hang glider.

Hatching the idea

I didn't know it at the time, but that flying experience and the hang glider shape must have planted a seed in my brain. It was probably why I started to tinker with delta kites and used them to experiment with scaring pigeons off my oilseed rape.

The trouble was, they kept crashing. I remember getting three in the air and

going to have breakfast, only to come back to find them all on the ground: hardly very scary for pigeons. The wind will always drop at some point – that's just a fact of life.

I thought to myself, 'there must be a way of making them self-launching'. And I was determined to make it happen.

The second bit of background that helped spark the whole idea was that we used to use CB equipment around our farm back in the '70s, and we still had a load of equipment lying about – including a five metre aerial. If, I reasoned, I used the aerial



John Galloway holding a Scare'm Hawk kite

and tied the kite to it with a shorter length of cord, it wouldn't crash. I tried it and it sort of worked, ('sort of' because a radio aerial is made of entirely the wrong material), so even if it wasn't quite 'job done', at least it was 'concept cracked'.



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First fledgling steps

The third thing that helped me along was the fact that I'd always loved sailing and I have a modest yacht.

Once, when I took my family on holiday to Holland and we were sailing along the canals there, I noticed the way the fishermen would move their long poles to make way for the boat... and that gave me an idea. When I came back home, I went straight to a fishing supplies shop, and asked the bemused shopkeeper for 40 six-metre roach poles – the sort used to get right to where the fish are swimming. I used these as the basis of my early prototypes.

But even then it was far from 'job done'. There may be relatively few parts in my kites, but each has to be just right and work in harmony with the others to make something that moves authentically, like an airborne raptor.

That's why I took my time in developing them with variations of countless different materials and fittings. It's why I roped in scores of testers, who would each give detailed feedback and suggestions for

improvements. And why I came up with 120 different prototypes before I launched the first Scare'm.

Beware the parrots

Of course, there have been imitators, because on paper it looks like a fairly simple piece of kit. But, unlike the copycats, those 120 prototypes have resulted in a supremely robust scaring machine that's been bench tested to destruction – but that destruction only happens when you ask them to pull a far greater force than would affect our lightweight kites, even in the strongest winds.

And, as for authenticity, it just makes sense to me that it moves and behaves in a way that birds respond to. Our hawk kite mimics the shape and size of a large hawk, and it's in black because that's the silhouette of a hawk as seen from below.

Birds feel very, very uncomfortable about predators overhead. In fact, they're 'programmed' for a flight response. The kite in our Scare'm Hawk Complete hovers at about 12 metres, just like a sparrow hawk, for the maximum scare factor!

Mastering the skies

Our kites have been out for a little while now, and we've been answering the phone to people who want to put them in places we'd never envisaged, so we've developed them to help protect against flying pests everywhere.

They may have started off protecting crops, but today you're just as likely to find a Scare'm hovering over industrial units, solar panels, fish farms, schools, or protecting boats, ships and docks... there's even one patrolling the entrance to the Eurotunnel in Folkestone.

It's funny to think what started as a bit of a hobby has now turned into a successful business. Our kites are now sold direct to customers from our online shop at www.scarem.co.uk or, if advice is needed about which kit to choose, just give us a ring.

