

Predisposed to complain

It is known that those who fear a noise source are more likely to object to the noise. For example, fear of an aircraft crash in someone living near an airport may lead to an additional anxiety factor of up to 15dB or more. This is a penalty, which the anxious person requires to be applied to the noise, in order to reduce their reaction to that of their more typical neighbours.

The origins of an anxiety may be hard to discover, although it is possible that, in a few cases, anxieties about noise have been deliberately fostered in others by objectors to a development. The objectors are harming those for whom they declare support.

This is a difficult topic to deal with, shrouded in a complex of motivations and preconditioned responses, the origins of which may be lost in a person's past. It is equally, a difficult topic to write about, but is one which merits airing, especially when the objectors may be using weak, even false, arguments, or simply misunderstand the area in which they profess expertise.

An example is an objector to wind turbines who went public with assertions that the amplitude modulation of wind turbine emissions, the regular swish - swish sound, is infrasound and, by implication, harmful. The swish is, of course, a time modulation of aerodynamic noise, which is at frequencies typically between about 500Hz and 1000Hz, and has no connection with infrasound.

Although all the media hype on infrasound of the 1970's and 1980's has been discredited, concerns about infrasound still lurk in the public psyche. It appears that this objector was either so uninformed as to be best advised not to make statements on noise, or was knowingly causing anxiety in order to gain support. Maybe, there was an element of both of these.

By building up false concerns, this irresponsible behaviour compounds an already difficult area in subjective response and has no place in rotational discussions of any noise problem.

noise
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DEER

Impressive antlers may be the most eye-catching attribute of the male deer, but it's the quality of a stag's mating call that attracts the female of the species, a new study, has discovered. The research was carried out by Ben Charlton, with Dr David Reby and Dr Karen McComb from the Centre for Mammal Vocal Communication Research, Department of Psychology, University of Sussex, and is published in *Biology Letters*. According to the findings ovulating red deer hinds (females) show an active preference for male roars advertising larger males. This study provides the first experimental evidence from non-human mammals that females use an acoustic cue to body size when selecting a mate, and suggests that female mating preferences may have provided an important selection pressure for broadcasting size-related information in red deer and other mammals.

CICADAS

Experts say the piercing mating call of the 17-year cicadas, which have taken parts of the Chicago area by storm, could cause damage to the ears of humans. Some areas thick with the periodical insects can experience mating calls in excess of 90 decibels - about as loud as a bulldozer - and that sound can cause physical and psychological strain in humans. Billy Martin, a hearing scientist at Oregon health and Science University and director of Dangerous Decibels, a public health campaign designed to reduce noise-induced hearing loss, said long-term exposure to the sound can cause hearing loss, anxiety, aggravation and high blood pressure. "Loud sound is very stressful, especially if the sound is annoying and loud," Martin said "It's the double whammy and cicadas, for the most part, are both."

NEW SOUTH WALES

Fears that tough new noise laws could spell the end of backyard barbecues, lead to crankier neighbours and create extra headaches for police and council officers are unfounded, the NSW government says. Labour MP Verity Firth, the Minister Assisting the Minister for Environment, says the proposed changes are all about common sense. "We don't want to stop the Australian barbecue", Ms Firth told reporters in Sydney. "Obviously, we want people to be able to enjoy their private homes, but we also want people to be able to live in peace and not put up with constantly loud neighbours. All of this is about a common sense approach." Tougher controls would simply provide extra protection against "completely vexatious" neighbours, she said. Under the proposed regulations, noisy musical instruments and sound systems would be banned after 10pm on week nights, instead of midnight. Car and house alarms that sound for more than four hours will attract fines of up to \$600 and hotted-up cars will need to have exhaust bafflers and silencing devices fixed. The new rules will also ban overnight use of water pumps, and regulations covering noise emitted by recreational boats will be strengthened.