Summer Newsletter 2013

what's buggin' ya?

AN EDUCATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON MANAGING INSECTS IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

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Summer is nearly over, and insects are abounding! Heat, humidity and periodic rains all make for an interesting mix for the summer bugs. Read on to learn which insects you may see in your landscape this summer.

Molly Keck

WHOOLY BEARS

You may have noticed some strange, fuzzy caterpillars crawling around your landscape lately. These are called Whooly Bear Caterpillars. There are a couple different color varieties. Some are completely black and others have a reddish stripe down the middle.

Whooly Bears are not Asps, as some people call them. They are not poisonous like true Asps or Puss Caterpillars. However, they have urticating hairs that can cause an allergic reaction in some people. These hairs are a defense mechanism against predators. Imagine if you were a bird and ate one – those hairs would tickle and hurt all the way down. I avoid touching Whooly Bears just in case. A good rule of thumb is that anything brightly colored or with hairs is warning me to stay away.

Whooly Bears are the larval form of the Great Leopard Moths. They are usually abundant around Spring, but this summer, they are making an appearance.

Whooly Bears are of no concern as long as you don't pick them up. They generally feed on broad leafed plants and are not considered a pest.

Photo by Bart Drees.

Photo by John Jackman

BAG WORMS – MAKING A STRANGE APPEARANCE THIS SUMMER

Last summer was the summer of crickets and grasshoppers, and it seems this summer is the summer of bagworms. I have received more than the usual questions about bagworms – or more specifically the question asked is "what the heck is this?!" Bagworms are a very interesting insect. Most people notice them stuck to their window screens – and if you are lucky, you might see them scoot along in their bags.

Bagworm caterpillars collect leaves and make a little home that they carry around with them. As they develop and grow, their bag will continue to grow as well. There are multiple species of bagworms and they feed on a range of trees and shrubs.

The lifeycle of the bagworm is very peculiar. After pupating, male moths will crawl out of their bags, find a female and mate. Adult females never develop into moths; they remain in their bags and look like maggots. They never develop functioning mouthparts or eyes – their purpose in life is to mate and reproduce!

Although the host range of plants for bagworms is so broad, they rarely cause any significant damage to homeowner's landscapes. Rather, they are more of a novelty insect to watch move about the window screens and trees.

Photo by Brian Golick

The Future of Entomology!

If you can determine the future of entomology by the 45 Entomology Campers I hosted the past two weeks, let me tell you, it's a bright future!

Each summer, I host a youth entomology camp for budding scientists and entomologists. It is such a joy to see children learning and appreciating science through a subject they don't even realize is science – bugs!

This summer, I hosted two camps (and will host a third in August). ALL of my camps filled up with waiting lists. There are a lot of junior entomologists in San Antonio! We learn all about insects, collect and put together a collection, perform experiments with termites, Bess beetles, crickets, millipedes, and so much more. This year's theme was medical entomology, so we learned all about mosquitoes and the disease they transmit. My campers learned what a vector is, how West Nile is endemic to the US, and how to reduce mosquito breeding sites in their own backyard. It was amazing how much they learned, how much fun they had, and how much they enjoyed nature and science!

If you have a budding entomologist who you think would be interested in Entomology Camp, check out our website at http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu around spring break for summer registration information.

Humidity and Cockroaches

American Cockroach
Photo courtesy of Center for Urban and Structural Entomology, Texas A&M University

Unfortunately, the current humid weather is heaven for cockroaches such as Smoky Browns and Americans. High humidity is how they thrive, and you may have noticed large cockroaches in the house lately. Dry weather and high humidity drives them indoors.

Smoky Brown and American Cockroaches are large cockroaches (up to 1.5 or 2 inches in length), dark brown and can be found in sewers, around drains, bathrooms, kitchens, fireplaces, attics and other areas of high humidity in the house. American Cockroaches have a lighter brown ring around their head region and are slightly larger (up to 2 inches). Smoky Browns are nearly completely dark brown and slightly smaller (up to 1.5 inches).

Management is the same for both, and most people could care less what type of cockroach they have, just that they are large and want them out! Seal up any entry points and reduce humidity if possible. They come in from outdoors, so you must figure out how they are finding their way inside. Caulk, foam, or seal it up in whichever way possible. Apply pesticides around entry areas or areas where you see them most active to reduce the population. Be sure to read the labels properly for correct application procedures. Cockroach bait stations can also be effective if no other food source is left out. Sanitize by taking the trash out nightly, cleaning all dirty dishes (even those you leave out to soak), and putting up all food.

Smoky Brown Cockroach

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