

# CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

## ~ URBAN ENTOMOLOGY EXTENSION & RESEARCH ~

### Palmetto Pestalk January 2003 Newsletter<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Eric P. Benson  
Urban Extension Entomologist  
Department of Entomology  
Clemson University  
(864) 656-3111  
fax: 656-5065  
e-mail: ebenson@clemson.edu

Have you heard about the extremely deadly tropical spiders that live under toilet seats at Olive Garden restaurants? If you spend any time on the Internet, you probably have.

When I was recently told this story as fact by a friend while we were running, I politely listened. She asked me if calls had been coming in to Clemson about these spiders. I said no, but that I would do some checking on my Internet "bug" sources when I got back to my office.

The first web site I checked was [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com). This is a site that posts many modern urban myths and legends. Another site is [www.urbanlegends.about.com](http://www.urbanlegends.about.com), or you can go to a search engine such as [google.com](http://google.com) and enter "urban legends" to get a listing of other sites.

The toilet seat spider story was listed as an urban legend. The spider was given the fictitious name South American blush spider: *Arachnius gluteus*. There is no genus of spider call *Arachnius*, and *gluteus* refers to the big muscle in your backside! This is quite a creative name.

This story first emerged in 1998, and raced around the Internet, email to email. This

past October, the story was resurrected, modified and sent back out on the web to snare a new group of gullible net surfers.

To most people, insects and related arthropods are completely alien and poorly understood, making them the perfect creatures for tales and lore. However, some of our beliefs about pests and the best way to deal with them have historical roots.

For example, I recently was looking at my old Boy Scout handbook, published in 1966 (7<sup>th</sup> edition, cost: \$1.00!). In the first aid section was the following: *"If a tick has fastened itself to you, don't pull it off - the head will remain in your skin. Instead, cover the critter with grease or oil. This will close its breathing pores and make it let go. Or light a match, blow it out, and quickly touch the hot end to the rear of the tick to make it back out. Then wash with soap and water."*

While many folks still think this is the best way to deal with ticks, we now know that the best way to remove a tick is pull it straight out with forceps (tweezers) directed perpendicular to the tick's body, just behind the head. You don't want to squeeze the tick or touch it with a hot match as this can cause the tick to regurgitate and inject your body with pathogens. Coating the tick with grease or polish can sometimes work, but ticks may remain embedding for a long period, giving it more time to transfer disease.

This simple change in how we remove ticks is just one example of how our knowledge and techniques develop over time. I won't be surprised if some day we have even better methods or tools for removing ticks.

Accepting change has become cliché and no one should change for change's sake. On the other hand, the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" philosophy can eventually leave you playing catch up or dropping out of the pest control race. It is important to understand what changes are taking place in our industry and how they will impact your business. It is with this in mind that the SCPCA education committee developed this year's 2003 Annual Winter Meeting.

#### Embracing Change

The 44<sup>th</sup> Annual South Carolina Pest Control association Winter Meeting will be held February 11 - 13. Once again it will be held at the Adams Mark hotel in downtown Columbia. Our keynote speaker will be George Haborak. George will talk about Time and Life Management. This should be a great session as he discusses how we manage our professional careers and personal lives.

General sessions will cover important topics in pest management including termite control, wood destroying organisms and developing

regulatory issues. In addition, ant control, mold and moisture control and nuisance wildlife control will be the focus of several of our state and nationally recognized speakers.

To tackle these topics we'll have Dr. Jeff Lloyd on hand to present a detailed program on fungi and mold in structures. Mr. Fred McCutcheon will present environmental issues concerning mold.

The program and details for registration enclosed in this issue of Pestalk. Please register early to help us plan. If you have any questions about the program, please contact Jackie Ellis at 864/656-5048 or by email at [jells@clermson.edu](mailto:jells@clermson.edu). If you have any questions about registration, please contact Tom Gochnur at 803/788-6699 or by email at [teegee342@aol.com](mailto:teegee342@aol.com). See you in February!

### **Egregious Earwigs**

Most serious pests such as ants and termites come from relatively stable populations. Occasional invaders come from populations that can rise and fall depending on a variety of factors. It is difficult to predict all the factors that lead to occasional pests, but weather conditions and the habitat around a structure often play a part. Over the years, springtails, millipedes and sowbugs

have been temporary problems in South Carolina. Lately, earwigs have joined the ranks as a prominent pest. I don't know the reason for their prevalence, but we've had many calls about earwigs over the last month.

Earwigs got their name from an old European superstition that they would enter the ears of a sleeping person and bore in to their brain. Now that could keep you up at night!

The reputation of earwigs probably comes from their fierce looking cerci. Cerci are sensory appendages on the end of the abdomen of some insects. Cockroaches have cerci that help them move quickly out of harms way by detecting air movement coming from a descending object such as a swatting hand or stomping foot. Earwigs have thick, pincher-like cerci that they can use for defending themselves or occasionally to capture prey. While they may look dangerous, earwigs are quite harmless.

Most adults are between 1/4 to 1 inch long. In our area, they tend to be brownish or reddish with dark markings. One species has rings of dark color on cream colored legs. Adults have wings, but the front covers are very short. Their antennae are threadlike and their mouth parts are adapted for chewing.

Earwigs do not bite (or bore into brains) or harm buildings. They are general feeders that live and feed in leaf litter and mulched areas. Females maintain underground burrows where they lay and tend their eggs. They are one of the few non-social insects that actually exhibit parental care. If a female earwig senses a threat to her eggs, she will grasp them in her mouth and move them to a safer burrow.

The presence of earwigs in a home is an indication of moisture problems and access points around the structure. Earwigs cannot survive dry conditions.

If earwigs are a problem in some of your accounts, check for excessive mulch, poor water drainage or moisture problems near the structure. Have moisture problems corrected by your client. Also make sure door thresholds are caulked or sealed to prevent earwigs from entering structures. Don't overlook potted plants as a source of earwig infestations inside a structure.

Generally, insecticide treatments are not needed for earwig control. However, on rare occasions where earwig numbers are high and control is needed quickly, microencapsulated or suspension concentrate sprays in enough water to penetrate mulch and leaf litter can be

effective as an outdoor perimeter treatment. Scatter baits can also work if they are distributed down in to mulched areas. As with many occasional invaders, earwig infestations do not tend to be long term and are best controlled by cultural methods.

#### **Now's The Time To Be Posted On Paper Wasps**

One of the first insects to appear around homes each year are paper wasps. If growing vegetables and flowers is your hobby, you may consider paper wasps as welcomed guests. Like many other social wasps, paper wasps feed on many insect pests of gardens. However most folks do not appreciate paper wasps dangling from nests around their homes. Though paper wasps do not readily attack people, they will sting if they feel threatened or provoked. Many times people are stung when they bumble into paper wasp nests hidden in bushes or around structures.

There are many different types of paper wasps with different habits and life cycles. The most common paper wasps are about 5/8 to 3/4 inch in length. Many are brownish with yellow markings, though a few species have reddish markings.

During the winter, most paper wasps die, except new queens. Queens survive the winter by nesting in protected places such as under the bark of trees, or in cracks and crevices around structures. In the spring, several queens commonly get together to start a new nest. Eventually, one queen will dominate the others, making

them serve as workers for the new colony.

By scraping and chewing wood into a pasty pulp, paper wasps make paper-like nests in the shape of an umbrella. These nests are built in protected locations including in shrubs, on tree branches, on porch ceilings, window and doorframes, roof overhangs, attic rafters, and under decks joists or railings. The queen deposits eggs in the comb (cells) on the underside of the nest. After the eggs hatch, the grub-like larvae are mostly fed other insects such as caterpillars, the worker wasps collect. Once the larvae have matured, they pupate in their cells and join the colony as an adult. Adult paper wasps mainly feed on nectar.

Since most paper wasps die by the first hard frost, workers found late in the year may not require treatment. Most nests in natural areas away from structures should be left alone to allow the wasps to feed on garden pests.



If wasps are seen flying in one area around a home, inspect the area for the protected places these wasps like to build nests. Remember that some nests may be hidden from views such as in an attic, under a deck rail or porch floor. If the nest is found, spray it directly with a wasp and hornet aerosol. Use a product that can spray up to 20 feet and provides quick knock-down and kill of the wasps. If possible, treat in the early evening hours when all the wasps are on the nest or early on a cool morning. Do not use a flashlight to illuminate the nest as the wasps could be attracted to the light.

Remove the nest after the wasps are killed to discourage future paper wasps nests.

If new paper wasp colonies continue nest in the same areas around your clients home, encourage them to make alterations. For example, if wasps are nesting in attic areas or other voids, have your client exclude them by screening any openings or vents. On exterior surfaces, a fresh coat of paint or varnish will make it difficult for the wasps to attach their nests to the slick surface. Finally, homeowners should keep bushes well trimmed and properly thinned to discourage paper wasps from nesting on inner branches.

<sup>1</sup>Note: This newsletter is a regular submission to Palmetto Pestalk.

For information concerning this publication contact:

Tom Gochnaur  
9721 Dunbarton Drive  
Columbia, SC 29223  
Phone: 803-788-6699  
Fax: 803-788-9698

Email: teegee342@aol.com.