

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

~ URBAN ENTOMOLOGY EXTENSION & RESEARCH ~

Palmetto Pestalk January 2004 Newsletter¹

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

I don't consider myself a rabid fan of Clemson sports. I do root for the Tigers, but my car is not covered with paws, my wardrobe only has a little orange and the last time I cut myself, I bled red. Still, I must admit that when our family went to London over the Christmas holidays, we did bring a small orange "Tiger Rag" emblazoned with a white tiger paw. In the Clemson World Alumni Magazine, they often have photographs of Clemson folks traveling around the globe, holding a Tiger Rag. In some photographs, people are holding their rags doing exciting things, like parachuting from airplanes or like being consumed by a real tiger. Our family planned something more benign, like standing in front of Big Ben or maybe with the Queen, if we got the chance.

While riding the London Underground (subway), my daughter spied a young teenage boy with a tiger paw hat. "Isn't that a Clemson hat?" she asked. "We're from Clemson," she added. "Yea," the boy replied, "I like to follow their football and baseball teams."

Nearby the boy's father spoke up, "We're actually from New York, but for some reason my son started following

Clemson a few years ago so we bought him the hat."

I joined in, "Good choice, because Clemson fans are everywhere," and from my pocket, like magic, I pulled out our Tiger Rag. The father gave me a very strange look and said, "I've heard about people like you!" Even though the father was not impressed, the boy thought it was pretty cool to meet Clemson fans on a subway in London.

It really is a small world. Whether you are part of the "Clemson world" or another world, you encounter people with similar backgrounds and interests wherever you go. And it is nice to feel connected to others.

For 44 years, individuals involved in world of pest control have been connected at the Annual South Carolina Pest Control Association Winter Meeting. On February 10-12, we'll hold our 45th annual meeting at the Adams Mark Hotel in downtown Columbia. Retired Atlanta Braves pitcher, Jose Alvarez, will be our motivational speaker with his talk titled "Winning: A Champion's Vision." The theme of the meeting will be "Courage, Character and Curve Balls." We will also have Pest Control Technology Professional of the Year, Cindy Mannes, at the meeting to talk about new developments at the National Pest Management Association and Professional Pest Management Alliance. Nationally known consultant, George Rambo, will be back on

the program talking about "Developing Technologies for Termite Control."

We'll have plenty of other speakers and topics including "Wage and Benefits," "Marketing Tips" and "Writing Contracts" for managers. Technical talks will include "Borates," "Retreats," "Crawl Space Moisture Research," "Cockroach Bait Aversion," "Fire Ant Control," and "Commercial Rodent Control." On Thursday afternoon we'll wrap up the sessions with a series of open roundtable discussions. Each roundtable topic will have a moderator to facilitate discussion, and the format will be open and relaxed to encourage all attendees to participate.

You'll find registration materials enclosed in this issue of pest talk. If you have questions about registration, please contact Tom Gochnaur at 803/788-6699 or by email at teegee342@aol.com. If you have questions about the program, please contact Jackie Ellis at 864/656-5048 or by email at jells@clemson.edu.

Be connected! Be part of the pest control world! Register for the 45th Annual Pest Control Association Winter Meeting. See you there!

Zounds! Zorapterans!

As pest control professionals you know that the world is full of insects. To keep them all straight, entomologists use a classification sequence to categorize organisms (I wrote about this system in the

April/May 2002 issue of Pestalk.) One of the higher levels of the classification system is the category Order. For example, all beetles are in the Order Coleoptera. All ants, bees and wasps are in the Order Hymenoptera. All zorapterans are in the Order Zoraptera.

"What are zorapterans?" you asked. Well, zorapterans are a little like tiny termites. While they are not rare, they are rarely found, due to their small size and hidden habits. For these reasons, very little is known about them. In the 875 page general entomology textbook I keep by my desk, only two pages are dedicated to zorapterans.

What we do know is that most zorapterans are about 1/16 inch in length. Their bodies and antennae are shaped like termites. Though they are not truly social, they often live in groups. Like termites, there are winged forms that tend to be dark in color and non-winged forms that tend to be white. Zorapterans feed on fungus spores or scavenge on small dead insects. Zorapterans usually live under the bark of rotting logs or molding wood.

Since 1984, when I started studying for my Ph.D. in entomology, I have quested for zorapterans (okay, maybe not quested, but I have looked for them when collecting insects). I never found one, until last month. I was checking termite monitoring stations around a house in Greenville when I had my first zorapteran experience. On the side of the moldy monitoring wood I extracted from the station, I found two tiny insects. At first I thought they were very young termites, but it would be extremely

unusual to find young termites on the surface of wood. Then I realized it: Zounds!

Zorapterans!! My entomological quest has been fulfilled!!! Then, like a big-game hunter, I promptly threw them into a vial of alcohol and brought back to my office. If they were bigger, I would mount their heads over my desk.

Seriously, I have never ceased to be amazed about how we can continue to learn or see new things every day whether we are involved with pest control or urban entomology. So keep your eyes and mind open. You may not be on an entomological quest but the next time you are out "hunting" for pests, you might just find an elusive zorapteran.

Head Lice And Spider Holes

When Saddam Hussein was captured near his hometown of Tikrit, I was relieved that he was finally captured. Like many of you, I watched the first photos (shown over and over) of him after capture being checked for head lice. I also listened to the detailed reports about his spider hole hideout.

During Saddam's lice check, which was considered a humiliation to him, the doctors check over his ears. This is a typical practice. When infestations are low, head lice are usually found in the hair above the ears and on the back of the scalp. With higher populations, they may be found on other parts of the head including the entire scalp and eye lashes.

Head lice are most usually transferred by direct contact with infested individuals, often family members. Lice can also

be transferred by sharing clothing, such as hats, or combs with infested individuals.

If during his travels during 2003, Saddam had been concerned about head lice, he could have gotten our fact sheet on head lice at our web site: <http://entweb.clemson.edu>. He could have also received great information from the National Pediculosis Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the understanding and proper treatment of head lice. At the web site: <http://www.headlice.org>, he could have ordered the LiceMeister comb which is particularly effective at removing nits. At the very least, Saddam would have realized that head lice are a medical problem and not a pest control problem.

Apparently there were no head lice on Saddam. I guess when you are spending time in spider holes, you don't have a lot of direct human contact.

As an entomologist, I know about spider holes, but I had not heard the term used before as a hiding place for people. William Safire, a columnist for the New York Times, wrote that spider hole is army lingo from the Vietnam era. He pointed out that the Vietcong would dig holes and place a clay pot large enough to hold a soldier. The holes would then be covered with wood and leaves and the Vietcong would spring out and attack passing American patrols. According to Safire, if the pot cracked or broke, the man inside could be attacked by poisonous spiders or snakes, hence the term "spider hole".

I respect Mr. Safire's abilities as a journalist, and I personally do not know the first

origin of spider hole, but I don't think it is derived from spiders falling into the holes. I think it probably comes from spiders rushing out of holes. Many spiders, including some of the common wolf spiders in South Carolina, dig holes. Trapdoor spiders make some of the most elaborate holes, with a concealed entrance. Like a crouching Vietcong soldier, a spider, in its hole, will rush out and attack prey that passes by.

The most adaptive spiders do not only use their hole to attack. Spider holes can protect the occupant from temperature extremes and from other predators like scorpions. Some trapdoor spiders actually keep the door to their hole shut with an attached thread of silk. Trapdoor spiders will especially hold their door shut when they are vulnerable during molting. A few species also have added security measures by having additional rooms, multiple doors and escape tunnels.

Perhaps if Saddam had spent a little more time studying the habits of trapdoor spiders, he would have had a way out of his spider hole. But I guess he was pretty busy in 2003, and we're all glad his spider hole was a dead end.

Insect Information Increases

Late in 1997, we started the Clemson University Insect Information Series. This series is a collection of fact sheets on beneficial and pest insects and related organisms. Some of the topic areas include Household and Structural Pests, Turf and Ornamental Pests and Medical and Veterinary Pests. By the start of this year, we have 57 fact sheets available on the most common insects and spiders you

encounter day-in and day-out under the Household and Structural section. Some of our newest fact sheets include information on earwigs, baldfaced hornets, European hornets, brown widow spiders and termite baits. There are many other sheet under the other topics.

You can access the fact sheets at our entomology web site: <http://entweb.clemson.edu/>. Look under the insect information section. If you haven't been there lately, you may want to give our site a "click".

¹Note: 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.