

Pest Control Alert

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Invading Black Scarab Beetles

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In the spring and late summer of 2010 occurred mass emergences of a black scarab beetle. I have had irregular reports of mass emergences of this critter each year for the past several years, but none of those reports seem to compare to what has happened here in 2010, especially the past couple weeks (August 2010). The identification of this beetle is still not confirmed. However, evidence suggests that it is either the Sugarcane beetle (*Euethola rugiceps*) or the Rice Beetle (*Dyscinetus morator*).

Since not much is known about either species, much of what I write below is speculation and educated guesses. It appears as though there may be two generations per year of this insect in Georgia given the mass emergences reported in April/May and again in August 2010. I suspect that the mass emergence we are experiencing now (August 2010) will result in a generation of beetles that will overwinter as larvae, complete development in the spring of 2011, and result in a predictable emergence in April/May.

Damage to Buildings. As noted by pest control companies and county agents, in addition to being a major nuisance pest this beetle can cause significant damage to soft, pliable roofing materials or the caulk at the intersection of a wall and flat surface (see photo below). Because the beetles have such an aversion to sunlight, they attempt to burrow into the ground no matter where they are. This is sometimes along a wall or on a rooftop. When they dig away from the light, they sometimes find soft, pliable caulk or other soft materials that are susceptible to being damaged. These strong beetles are successful at penetrating these materials, and can cause significant damage.

“Control”. No good answer is available. Based on what little is known about this beetle, control is going to continue to be exceedingly difficult. In speaking with folks who know about this beetle, I can only surmise that it may be eating the roots of grasses. As they complete development, they emerge from the grass and are then strongly attracted to the lights on buildings (they are nocturnal insects). During the mass emergence, the insects are presumably mating and going back to sites to lay eggs (may or may not be the same location from which they emerged) where they will emerge the following spring. The million dollar question is “where are these sites”? If we knew where these sites were, we might be able to apply a granular product that might stop (by killing) the beetles as they reenter the ground after the August emergence, thereby stopping the springtime emergence. If this cannot be accomplished, we’re stuck with dealing with the consequences of the mass emergence.

To manage an emergence, several things can be done. First, and most important, is light management. If it can be done, lights (some or all) should be turned off during the period that beetles are active. Or, lights on the building can be changed to those that are less attractive to beetles (yellow lights) (never use mercury vapor lighting, unless you’re trying to attract the beetles). The problem with this partial solution is that beetle emergence may be finished by the time the lights are changed since mass emergences are typically complete in three weeks or so. If lights must stay on, try altering the way they

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face or try relocating lights so that they're away from, but still illuminating, the building. Another idea is to try a "bait" or "interceptor" light. These lights, and they should be highly attractive, should be placed in an area that attracts the beetles away from the building or from an area that's trying to be protected, such as entryways into buildings.

Chemical treatments (sprays) likely don't do much. If used, they should be microencapsulated or wettable powder formulations or any other formulation that maintains bioavailability of the insecticide. Always read and follow the label if an insecticide spray is chosen for use. You and only you are responsible for proper insecticide treatments. Treatments should be made around lights or in areas where beetles congregate (corners, lines along the intersection of a wall and flat surface), so that when beetles land they will be exposed to the insecticide.

Figure 1 Photo by Ted Wynne, Newton County (GA) Extension Agent

