

Kansas Insect Newsletter

For Agribusinesses, Applicators, Consultants and Extension Personnel



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Sugarcane aphid now in Kansas

The first report of sugarcane aphid, *Melanaphis sacchari*, in Kansas was received over the Labor Day weekend. A number of small colonies were discovered on grain sorghum in Sumner County. Economic infestations are unlikely in Kansas this year because the crop is too far advanced, but are highly likely next year given the range expansion that has occurred to the south of us in 2014. Preliminary observations suggest all our important aphid predators will prey on this aphid, but its fast development and high reproductive rate will pose a challenge for biological control, at least initially.



J.P. Michaud

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All My Children ---- Not the TV Soap

In last week's Kansas Insect Newsletter, I addressed whitelined sphinx moth larvae in my purslane patch. Their appetites are amazing as is the growth that they achieve. Papa Bob is proud to report that "The Kids" are doing well.



Fall Webworms

The appearance of fall webworms is unpredictable. When and where they will occur is anybody's guess. That is, they sometimes seem to be "absent"/unreported for several years only to suddenly reappear. Undoubtedly during periods-of-absence, they actually occur, but possibly in low numbers so as not to attract attention/be reported. But always there are unseen "seed" populations in most areas. And, certain undefined current prevailing conditions contribute to/account for outbreak years.

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On a recent collection trip several days ago (Shawnee, Douglas and Johnson counties), I noticed quite a few trees-along-the-roadways with fall webworm “nests”. Not having been on-the-road locally, I purposely visited several sites in Riley Co. where I knew of their past presence ---- and I did note occasional FWW webs.

All of the webbing that I observed was that of the redheaded race of FWW. Their web masses are “thinner” than that of the black-headed race. In addition to their definitive red and black head capsules, tubercles/bumps are correspondingly red and black.



Additionally, there are preferred tree hosts: flowering crab, walnut, hickory, pecan, sweetgum and sycamore for the redheaded race; ash, elm and Osage-orange for the blackheaded race. Mulberry and redbud serve as hosts for both races.

Other than the unsightliness of the web masses, and/or the objectionable appearance of the caterpillars, trees are not in peril due to the presence of fall webworm. Consider that late-in-the-season population buildups occur at a time when the photosynthetic processes are near season’s end, and foliage is on the verge of shutting down soon to be followed by leaf drop.

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Removal of extensive web masses is impractical. Nor is it possible to remove webbing higher up in tree canopies.



If within “reach” --- To spray or not to spray? That becomes a personal decision. It needs to be remembered that fall webworm activities are within the confines of their “web home”. Merely applying an insecticide to the outside of the web mass will result in poor control because the webbing acts as a barrier, intercepting the insecticide and thus protecting the caterpillars within. Rather, a sprayer wand must be thrust through the webbing thus allowing the spray to reach the targeted pests. Should one decide not to spray, the next question is

If within “reach” --- To prune or not to prune? Again, a personal decision. Bear in mind that branches removed could result in future “bare spots”. Rather, consider hand removal of the webbing... The dead foliage along with the caterpillars will be removed with the webbing.

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And, the “bare branch” still maintains auxiliary buds for the production of new foliage the ensuing Spring.



Additional on-line information is available in [Extension Publication MF2395, Web-Producing Caterpillars in Kansas.](#)

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Dragonfly Swarms

There are numerous species of dragonflies. Most often they are observed around bodies of water. This is logical because dragonflies are tied to an aquatic environment. Dragonflies deposit eggs in water. Dragonfly naiads (aquatic nymphs) live in the water where they feed upon aquatic organisms. When a naiad has completed its development, it crawls out of the water and up onto vegetation at water's edge. This is followed by a final molt and the emergence of the adult form.

Often times with the approach of summer's end, people observe swarms of dragonflies coursing about near sunset. These are green darner dragonflies --- the largest species in Kansas with a wingspan of 4 ½ inches. Males have a distinctively colored blue/turquoise abdomen, whereas that of the female tends to be purplish-grey.

Due to their speed and agility, dragonflies are frustratingly difficult to capture with an aerial net. In addition to their ability to control their individual wingbeats, their evasive capabilities are further facilitated by their possessing massive compound eyes which provide them a 360° view. A dragonfly is still watching you after it has flown by. These same eyes are able to detect fast motions such as other flying insects. Using their unique legs to form a



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basket, dragonflies swoop up their prey and eat-on-the-fly, stopping to perch only if they have captured a larger prey which demands their full attention.

Green darners are a unique species because certain populations are known to migrate. However, in Kansas, green darners are year-round residents. Thus those which are seen swarming are not preparing to “head south”. Rather, they are feasting mostly on small flies/gnats/midges, and possibly (as suggested by some) small hymenopterans (eg. flying ants) and beetles. [Because they are swarming high up in the air, I think it questionable they are feeding on mosquitoes which tend to stay closer to their ground-level resting places.] Especially after rains, flies/gnats/midges seem to burst forth. While we may not be aware of the “meals” overhead, somehow the dragonflies are. How they detect these wee-fliers gathered over grassy stretches seemingly far removed from their normal territories is not known. Apparently through trapping studies, it has been determined that the blue darner swarms consist of males only. Females choose to forage closer to their water habitats.

To give dragonflies their due regarding mosquito control: as previously mentioned, dragonfly naiads are hunters. And mosquito “wigglers” (larvae) and “tumblers” (pupae) are fair game for the naiads. So, YES, dragonflies may lower mosquito populations. But this would be a small scale reduction. Given the plentitude of alternative aquatic life forms in natural aquatic situations for naiads to feast on, the tremendous egg production capabilities of mosquitoes, and the fact that certain “treehole” mosquito species deposit eggs in naiad-free mosquito breeding sites, mosquitoes simply are a fact of life that we must contend with ----- dragonflies or no dragonflies.

Bob Bauernfeind

Insect Diagnostic Laboratory Report

<http://entomology.k-state.edu/extension/diagnostician/recent-samples.html>

Eva Zurek

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Sincerely,

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