The 11th Timely Information

Lovebugs are not lovely

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September 7, 2012
Structure and household Entomologist

You may love the Lovebug lyrics by Jonas Brothers while driving. But for Alabamians, lovebugs are a stubborn, sticky seasonal problem for drivers.

Lovebugs or Plecia nearctica Hardy, swarm out twice a year like clockwork—every May and September. The autumn swarm is usually larger and plague-like. Although individual females live for only a few days, adult flight activity last for about a month before they disappear.

This fly earns the common name "lovebugs" because it often flies while still coupled during mating.

They become abundant locally often after a rain. They are concentrated in areas with decaying organic matter, pastures and farms. Swarming occurs primarily from 10 to 11 a.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. each day.

They do not bite or sting and are not poisonous, but a nuisance to motorists when smashed on car windshields and headlights, or when they interfere with house painting and other human activities. Spattered love bugs left on a car and exposed to sunlight will turn acidic within 24 hours, causing damage to car paint, and can cause radiators to clog and overheat.

Research into love bugs isn’t a priority for scientist because of their minor economic importance. The only economic loss comes from people paying for car washes and paint jobs.

For drivers, wax might help protect the paint jobs, but there are no guarantees. A costly clear lacquer painted on the front of the car can provide an extra barrier of protection. The cheapest and probably most labor-intensive solution is to rinse off the bug debris within 24 hours to help neutralize the acid.
A few scientific information on lovebugs:

- Lovebugs are about 3/8-inch long flies with a pair of smoky colored wings and a reddish-orange thorax.
- The female is larger than the male and the female will fly off dragging the attached male.
- Flies lay eggs in moist habitats such as ditches and swampy areas high in organic matter. Larvae or maggots live on decomposing organic matters in the soil. They are harmless as immatures and are actually beneficial by decomposing plant tissues.
- Flies are naturally attracted to open or semi-open areas such as roadways and ditches, often in wooded areas. It is generally believed that car exhaust and/or gasoline attract these flies.

Management

There is no easy solution to lovebug problems.

A number of insecticides have been evaluated for effectiveness in controlling lovebug larvae and adults. Most of them kill lovebugs but are impractical because high populations of the insects occur over vast areas of the state. Remember, lovebugs do not respond to insect repellents containing DEET or citronella.

A vacuum cleaner can be used to remove adults from confined areas, such as in buildings and vehicles.

It may be necessary to learn to cope with lovebugs with a variety of methods for a few weeks each year. The following facts and suggestions will help:

- Netting stretched over front grills can prevent crushed flies from clogging radiators and thus prevent overheating on long trips. Some netting devices are commercially available.
- Daily cleaning of a vehicle will help protect the finish and prevent a build-up of love bug bodies on engine parts. Commercially available products containing petroleum distillates can facilitate the removal of crushed, dried insect parts from car finishes.