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April 25, 1995 (our 21st year)  
No. 263

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## INSECT NOTES

### A FULL AND COMPLETE SPRING - 1995

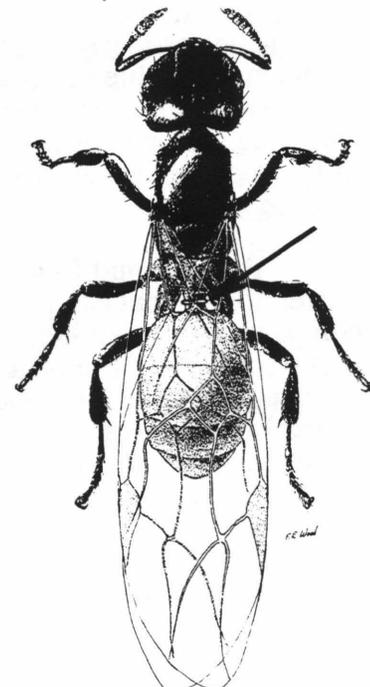
Spring 1995 looks to be bringing all the major insect players to the field--we have reports of boxelder bugs being active, yellow ant and mound ants have been swarming in some areas, a few home lawns (and houses!) have been blessed with clover mites by the thousands, ticks seem to have survived from the reasonable winter we had and are now restless and hungry, and of course, termites and carpenter ants are making plans for new colonies in and around houses and other structures.

To complete the list of major players, some counties in southwestern Virginia have been visited by periodical cicadas (the 17-year variety) --and their emergence has given some folks a noisy wake-up this spring! For those of you not experiencing this red-eyed little noise-maker, your turn is coming next year. Eastern areas of Virginia will experience periodical cicadas in a big way next year! We should prepare for damage to fruit and ornamental trees; and prepare for homeowners that have long forgotten the noise and nuisance these devils can produce.

The dry weather this spring--we are just meeting our rainfall norms this year--may mean there are fewer bacteria and fungi active in the soil, and that may help more grasshopper eggs to hatch, more ticks to survive, and other ground dwelling insects to survive! Oh, joy! But less rainfall also means that mosquitoes will have more difficulty in finding suitable sites for egg-laying.

### CARPENTER ANTS

One of the most important wood-infesting insects in the household/urban environment is carpenter ants. While these insects do not eat wood, only nesting there in small to large numbers, they can be structural pests (by weakening support beams) and nuisance pests simply by their presence indoors. However, carpenter ants are sometimes



just one of these (nuisance or structural), and not both! Carpenter ants can establish their nests outdoors in the dead areas of live trees, in the forgotten logs at the bottom of the firewood pile, or in the tree stump that did not get removed. They may have several nesting locations for one large colony, or only one. These outdoor colonies may include household kitchens as a part of their food-foraging territory, thus becoming a nuisance but not actually a structural pest.

Some carpenter ant colonies are established in moisture damaged wood that is part of the house, including posts, support beams in attics, wood siding, and even bathroom doors and floors. Usually the areas infested have been slightly damaged or at least exposed to decay fungi. Indoor nests can be large or small, and the ants may forage outdoors and indoors. The best indication that a nest has been established indoors is finding ants foraging in the kitchen or other part of the house early in the spring--February and March. Worker ants found in the kitchen in May and June are probably from colonies established outside.

Carpenter ant control is an art and a science, and some luck. Locating the nest and destroying the colony is the only sure way of control, but this may be difficult. A careful and close inspection of all potential areas of infestation is the first step. Following a wayward ant may not be fruitful--they are not always on their way back to the nest! Removing the infested wood is the first step, insecticide application can be made without removing the wood, but it should be a thorough treatment. Any of the common insecticides will provide control of these ants.

## **TERMITES AND PROFESSIONAL TERMITE CONTROL**

Subterranean termites will (or have already) begin swarming in Virginia soon. On warm days following a light rain the winged termites will come pouring out of the colonies looking for a mate, then for a place to establish a new colony! The first sign of an infestation for most homeowners is the presence of the swarming termites--then thoughts turn to control.

**Homeowner-based Termite Control.** I don't recommend that homeowners attempt the complicated and important task of trying to control an infestation of termites in their house. They usually lack the equipment and experience to apply insecticides properly to give the protection needed. I am aware of only one chemical available to homeowners for termite control--Orthochlor (it contains chlorpyrifos); it must be mixed with water and applied with whatever equipment is available. Homeowners may not be able to create the continuous and uniform band of treated soil around the outside and inside of the house that is necessary for termite control.

**Professional Pest Control Operators.** There is a great variety of professionals that can provide termite control--they range from large and local companies, to small local companies, to large national companies, and to the person that works out of the back of a truck on weekends! Selecting the company for the job is not easy, and is usually complicated by a fair range in cost to perform the control. The cost for termite control is based on chemicals, the size of the structure to be treated, and the estimated time to complete the job. Each company has its own fixed costs and other variables that may result in their quote being higher or lower than another company. Homeowners should listen to what will be done--the thoroughness of the job is important, and the reputation of the company in the area. There are about eight (yes 8!) different termiticides available for use today, but this

should not create a problem. All of these materials are effective! There may be some difference in cost between them, but they will all do the job of protecting the house from termites. Homeowners should not rush into selecting a company to provide control, waiting a few days or a week to decide is not going to result in the collapse of the floor in the kitchen! Do not be pressured into making a decision! The good and reliable companies have a lot of business in the spring of the year; you may have to wait a week or two to have your house treated--it will be worth the wait.

If there are questions regarding a pest control company, a source of information is the Va Pest Control Association (VPCA) - 703/891-9253, ask for Andrea Coron. She can provide you with the names and phone numbers of the members of the VPCA in your area. The value of utilizing VPCA members for pest control services, whether termite control or flea control, is that you can expect that they have a level of professionalism and training that befits the job. The VPCA has a long history and its membership represents the majority of the *professional* pest control companies in the state.

## PERIODICAL CICADAS

The periodical cicada has one of the longest life histories of an insect; broods of this small cicada occur in eastern U.S. every 13 or 17 years. The broods that occur in southern states emerge every 13 years, those in the northern states occur every 17 years. Virginia happens to be on the border of the 13 and 17 broods--so, we get some of each!

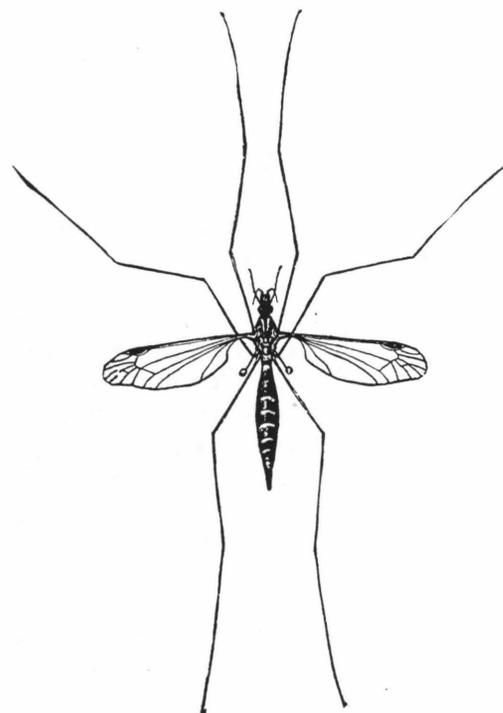


The immature stages of this cicada have sucking mouthparts and they spend their life cycle feeding on the sap of plant and tree roots. The adults emerge during the spring, usually during late April and early May, spend a short time mating and egg laying, then die. The eggs are laid in the tender branches of the new growth (this year). When the small nymphs hatch from the eggs they drop to the ground and burrow into the soil in search of a tree root they can feed on for the next 17/13 years (such a life!). The branches that the eggs are laid in often die--the egg laying process is quite damaging--and the leaves turn brown. The presence of several dead leaves (brown) at the tip of branches is called "flagging", and this is one of the most recognized signs of the presence of periodical cicadas--present long after the adults have sung their last song and died. Actually, flagging may be considered natural pruning--performed every 17/13 years!--large trees are rarely impaired by this. The most serious problem with tree damage is to very young trees, and to fruit trees. They can be protected by placing cheesecloth over them --to keep the cicadas off. Chemical control of periodical cicadas is probably not possible; there are so many it would be rather ineffective.

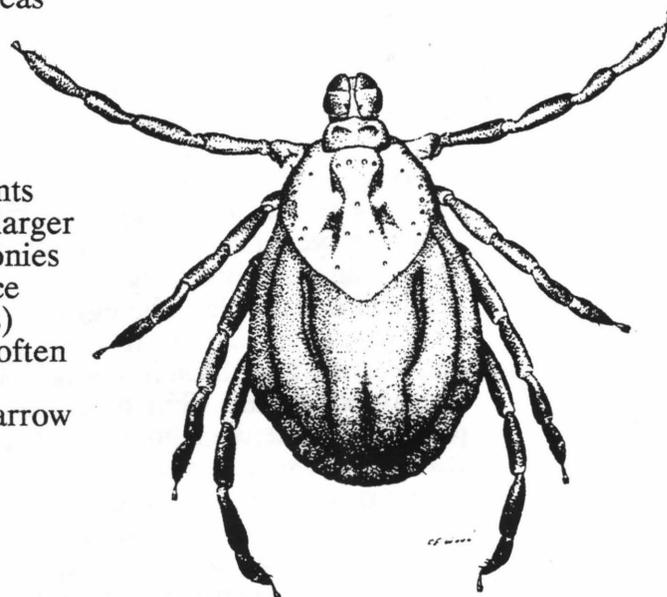
The sound produced by the male cicadas--starting early in the morning and going to dark--is one of the most bothersome aspects of these critters. Of course, there can be large numbers of these cicadas (and mere numbers is a problem), and when all those males get to singing--wow! Apparently, the singing has some value other than to attract females; some think that the collective noise serves to keep birds away. It might!

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE COMING WEEKS

**Crane flies.** It will be "big mosquito" time soon--when the large crane flies start collecting at outdoor lights at night. They may look like mosquitoes with their long legs and narrow wings, but crane flies do not bite (no mouthparts)! They are usually flying for a few weeks in the spring, then their numbers drop off and they are less common throughout the summer.

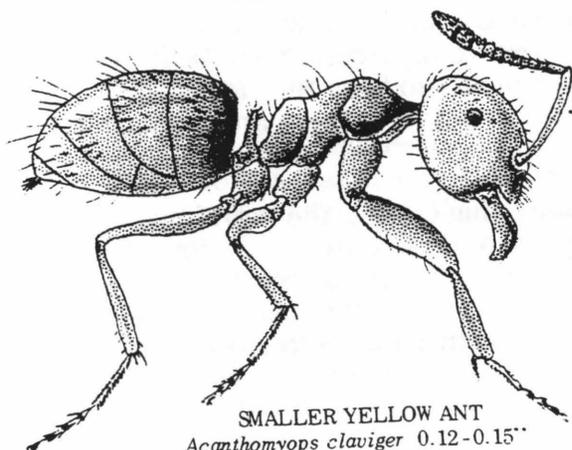


**Ticks.** Walking in the woods in the spring may result in collecting a few ticks on your pant legs, socks, or in your skin taking a blood meal! American dog ticks and lone star ticks are the most common species found in the wooded areas of Virginia. Both these species may transmit Rocky Mt. spotted fever! An insect repellent should be used--apply to the shoes/boots, socks, and pant legs--whenever excursions are planned for the woods or grassy areas surrounding woods. Once back from the hike, everyone should search themselves for ticks.



AMERICAN DOG TICK

**Yellow ants.** Perhaps the most common ants that swarm in the spring are the yellow ants--the larger and smaller yellow ant--*Acanthomyops* spp. Colonies of these small yellowish to brown ants can produce large numbers of winged ants (males and females) during warm, sunny days in the spring. They are often confused with termites--but they are easily distinguished from termites. Termites lack the narrow "waist" that characterizes ants.



SMALLER YELLOW ANT  
*Acanthomyops claviger* 0.12-0.15"