

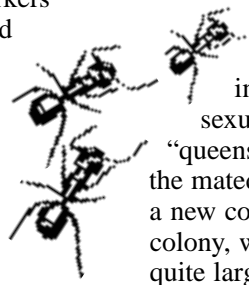
Carpenter Ants are Frustrating !

More people bring carpenter ants to the extension office for identification than any other insect. Carpenter ant colonies can occur in the structural part of the house where it is warm. Sometimes carpenter ants are active and even swarm when temperatures are quite cold outside.

In Nebraska, there are two species of carpenter ants that can infest structural wood of homes. The black carpenter ant, *Camponotus pennsylvanicus*, is very large (3/8 to 5/8 inch) and jet black. The other species, *Camponotus nearcticus*. *C. nearcticus* has no common name, but we refer to it as the "reddish carpenter ant." It is smaller in size than the black species (1/4 to 1/2 inch) and has a reddish brown head, thorax, legs and a black abdomen. Carpenter ants differ from other types of ants

because they have workers that vary in size, called "major" and "minor" workers.

By the time homeowners are aware of a carpenter ant problem, the colony is several years old. The colony begins with a single, winged queen who has mated. After the mating flight, she searches for a suitable location, usually wood that is damp or wet. The queen lays eggs and cares for immatures that develop into minor workers that begin to forage and help care for eggs and additional immatures that the queen produces. The colony grows slowly; it takes at least 2 to 3 years for major workers to be produced. A colony can be 6 to 10 years old before swarmers are produced.



Swarming results from individuals in a large colony developing wings and becoming sexually mature. After "queens" and "kings" mate, the mated queen flies off to start a new colony. The mature colony, which, by this time is quite large, remains behind and continues to produce workers. A mature black carpenter ant colony, Nebraska's most common species, may have several thousand workers.

Habits

The diet of carpenter ants is quite varied and includes living and dead insects, honey-dew from aphids, sweets, meat and fats. They do not eat wood. Foraging workers collect all the food for the colony and can forage up to 100 yards from

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"Tiny Red Dots Moving on My Window Sill"

Clover mites are common nuisance pests in Lancaster County. They are especially annoying in early spring and fall when they appear on window sills. With our relatively warm winter, we've had people reporting clover mites in December and January.

Clover mites are slightly smaller than a pin head and has a reddish-brown body. They look like dark specks crawling around windows, drapes, curtains and furniture. These mites are not insects, but are relatives of spiders.

Clover mites do not damage your home, furniture or injure your family or pets. They do, however, leave a nasty stain on fabrics when crushed. I remem-

ber one story of a flustered mother who found her young boys using the mites to "paint" pictures on their white bedroom walls. For this mom, these critters were much more than just a nuisance.

For clover mites indoors, use a vacuum cleaner or moist dust cloth or paper towel to gently dab up the pests. Avoid smearing the mites because they will stain.

This summer, you can try several management strategies to reduce the numbers next spring. This may include:

- Controlling or removing grasses and weeds around foundations.
- Create a barrier of gravel/marbles, sand or lava rock around the foundation.

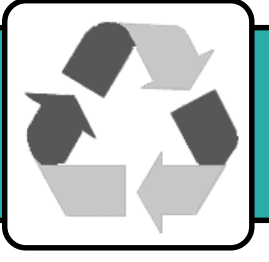
- Planting flowers and other plants that aren't attractive to clover mites can be used as a barrier.

- There are insecticides available to the general public to help control clover mites.

Unfortunately, these strategies won't help you deal with the critters on your window sill today. Your best bet is to work on adding these management strategies this summer so the clover mites won't find it as easy to get in your house this fall.

For more detailed information, pick up "Clover Mites and Their Management," NebGuide G93-1131 at the Lancaster County Extension Office. (SC)

Environmental Focus



Get Ready for Babies!

Before you know it, songbirds will begin searching out sites to build a nest. Are you ready? March is a perfect month to get ready for this exciting springtime event. And, we've got help for you at the extension office.

Single-compartment nest boxes are the easiest to build and most frequently used by birds. You can use the same basic box design for all types of birds. You just need to change the dimensions and hole sizes for the species of bird you want to attract.

One of our popular in-house fact sheets, "Build a Nest Box to Attract Birds," gives you tips on building a nest box for House Wrens, Chickadee, Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Common Flicker, Screech Owl, American Kestrel and Wood Duck. The fact sheet also covers information on nesting, protecting birds from predators and maintaining your nest box.



To obtain the fact sheet, 024-99, "Build a Nest Box to Attract Birds," call (441-7180) for your copy. The fact sheet can be mailed to you when you send a business-sized, self-addressed, stamped envelope to "Build a Nest Box to Attract Birds," 444 Cherrycreek Road, Suite A, Lincoln, NE 68528-1507. Or, visit our Environment and Natural Resources web site on the internet at <http://www.Lanco.unl.edu>.

With a little help from you, birds will find plenty of places in your yard to make a home. (SC)

Cats—Keeping the Urban Predator in Check

Cats sit like statues on sunny window sills. They loll peacefully on sidewalks on nice days. Americans love cats. There are an estimated 50 million plus cats in the United States.

Multiply 50 million cats by an occasional backyard bird kill and you can soon see that cats contribute to a significant loss of songbirds and other ground nesting birds. Already beleaguered in numbers by habitat loss and environmental degradation, native birds need all the help they can get.

How can cat owners prevent their cats from killing birds?

- Put a bell on your cat. It may not be a perfect solution, but it may help.

- Hang or post bird houses and feeders on cat-proof metal posts or wooden posts with a metal collar near the top.

- Houses or feeders should be at least five feet above the ground and away from objects that cats can climb on.

- Place feeders and birdbaths away from concealing vegetation, where cats can lurk. Many birdbaths are too low and allow easy access by cats.

- Keep cats inside more often.

- Contact your local animal control agent if you see feral (wild) cats in your neighborhood. Source: Oregon State Extension Service (SC)

Spring Housecleaning?

Take Advantage of the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Days

Date

Saturday, April 8
Saturday, May 20

Location

Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD)
3140 "N" Street, south parking lot
State Fair Park, parking lot, northeast of Ag Hall



Latex Paint Exchange Day. Only good, usable latex paint is accepted. Containers must be at least half full.

Time

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Items that you can bring for disposal:

- Heavy metals: items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats. Fluorescent bulbs and many batteries contain heavy metals but can now be recycled locally.
- Solvents: mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes.
- Pesticides: weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex.
- PCBs: Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors and televisions.

Leave products in their original container and keep the label intact. Open, leaking or rusted containers should be placed in a clear plastic bag during transport. Do not mix chemicals.

Do not bring medicines, explosives, fertilizers, used oil, general household trash, antifreeze, batteries or latex paint, except on May 20. For more specific information, call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040. (BPO)

Bluebird Conference on April 8

Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) will host its sixth annual conference on April 8 at Waverly High School, located one-half mile west of Waverly on Highway 6. This conference is open to the public and will run from 8 a.m. until about 4:30 p.m. The registration fee is \$10. Lunch will be available at a cost of \$5 before April 1 and \$8 after April 1.

The Saturday conference



will include presentations from experts from Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota and Montana on bluebird biology and adaptability to a variety of nest boxes, purple martin and wildlife research.

For more information or to register, phone Leland Osten at 402-423-8678 or email LO54101@navix.net. (BPO)