Red-Eyed Fly Lives, Eats Mole Crickets

Photo by James Castner *Red-eyed fly, Euphasiopterx depleta.*

The red-eyed Brazilian fly is alive and well . . . and pregnant! This is bad news for mole crickets and a blessing to Floridians, say University of Florida scientists. About 500 of the flies were released in April and June into an Alachua County test pasture by UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

"We were a little worried until we finally found several pregnant flies in our traps in late August," says entomologist Tom Walker. "But now it looks like we've established a new enemy of the mole cricket."

Mole cricket munching and burrowing does at least $46 million worth of damage each year to Florida golf courses, commercial turf operations, pastures and fields of vegetables. Coordinator Howard Frank, says the goal of the IFAS project is similar to most biological control efforts. "We're working toward reducing the mole cricket population to a point where it is no longer damaging."

The Brazilian fly, with its distinct red eyes, is about the size of a house fly.

by DAVID MORRIS, IFAS

Females come to the male mole cricket's mating call and lay living larvae on or near the male mole cricket. These larvae then burrow into the male or mates and emerge from the killed host about 10 days later.

The next obstacle for the project is winter. Mole crickets will be less active then, and flies may not survive the winter, but Walker remains optimistic. "We're 90 percent sure we'll have flies next spring. The fly comes from a climate like Gainesville's."

More fly pupae are scheduled for release this fall in Bradenton at the IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center. The mole cricket population has been monitored in Bradenton for years, so the situation seems ideal for evaluating the effects of the fly's marauding on mole cricket populations.

Scientists have introduced other natural enemies of the mole cricket in the past with varying results. More recently a kind of microscopic worm has proven quite successful, but the difficulty and expense are delaying breeding and distribution of the nematode.

With further success this nematode is likely to be a commercial proposition, while the red-eyed fly would probably be distributed by the Florida Department of Agriculture for free, according to Frank. Savings from reduced pesticide use and the resulting benefit to the environment make both alternatives attractive, said Frank, who has already received a number of inquiries.

Frank attributes part of the project's success to the support of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and its cooperative agreements with four Brazilian institutions for biological control research.

Though the project is still in the evaluation stage, the researchers have good reason to believe the red-eyed Brazilian fly will help control mole crickets. "We've reached step one, and so far the project has progressed just as we'd hoped," says Frank.

"We'll have to measure changes in mole cricket populations over several years to quantify the effects."

MULTI-PRO 418

Hahn, Inc. has introduced a more powerful, smoother running version of its Multi-Pro turf utility vehicle. The new Multi-Pro 418 is now equipped with an 18 HP twin cylinder Kohler magnum engine. Other new features include a larger, quieter muffler system, louvered engine compartment panels, and a redesigned smoother clutch. The seat tilts forward for easy access to all major drive components. Attachments include a 160-gallon spray system, computerized sprayer controller, a 17-cubic foot capacity pendulum action spreader, and a 1500 lb. capacity utility bed. For more information and product literature, contact the company at 1-800-457-4246, or write HAHN, INC. at 1625 North Garvin, Evansville, Indiana 47711-4596.

Douglas hires Shook

Douglas Fertilizer & Chemical, Inc. with plants in Zellwood and Lake Placid, Florida, recently hired Matt Shook as Territory Manager. He will be responsible for sales to golf courses, lawn spray businesses, and nurseries. Matt has a degree in Agronomy from the University of Florida. He has held sales positions with Wheeler Fertilizer and Lesco, Inc.