

Black Turfgrass Ataenius (BTA): The Other White Grub

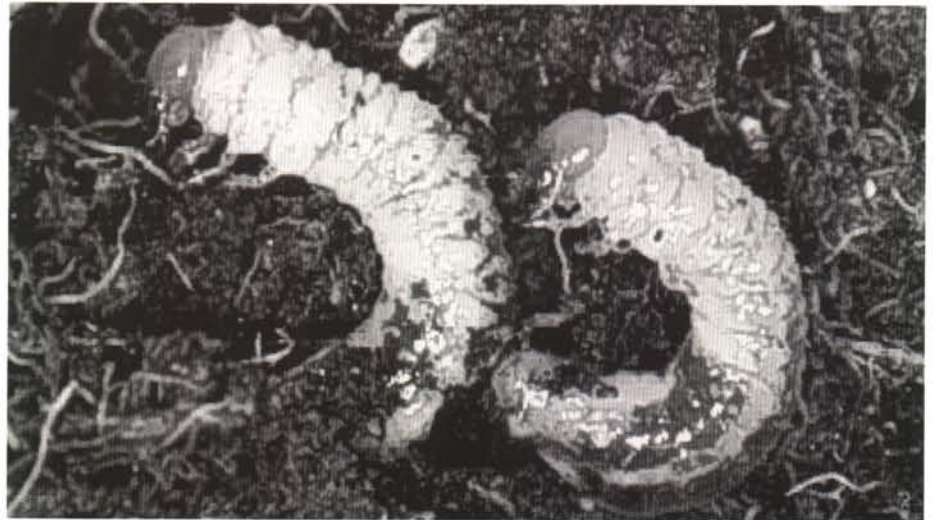


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It seems that many of the “larger” white grub species (i.e., Japanese beetle, May/June beetle, etc.) get all the recognition and notoriety. Nonetheless, the black turfgrass ataenius, *Ataenius spretulus* (Haldeman), is of equal importance. BTA can also be a serious pest on golf course greens, fairways, tees, and even turfgrass research farms. However, due to the sporadic nature of the black turfgrass ataenius (BTA), this important turfgrass insect pest is often forgotten, especially since it is quite unpredictable.

Recently, at the O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Educational Facility, we experienced a serious infestation of BTA grubs. Visual inspections revealed counts greater than 100 BTA grubs per one square foot; populations this high typically result in serious injury to turfgrass. In fact, populations as low as 30-40 grubs per square foot can cause measurable damage to turf. As you are likely aware, this year was anything but “normal.” This holds true for the “outbreaks” of BTA that have occurred in many parts of Wisconsin this year.


Typically, BTA adults begin laying their eggs in the late spring, usually sometime in mid-May. However, this year adult BTA adults were not observed until mid - to - late June. Subsequently, grub activity and damage was not seen until early to mid - July. Damage associated with BTA grubs is quite easy to detect; as a result of the grubs consuming succulent root tissues, the turf (leaves) typically exhibits signs of heat or drought stress. Upon closer inspection, the turf can be literally “rolled-up,” similar to carpet. When the turf gets to this point, the only option is to apply what is known as a curative insecticide treatment, apply an



appropriate level of fertility, and irrigate regularly (i.e., daily) to help aid the turf recover and “mask” any further damage.

Ideally, BTA grubs should be controlled preventatively with either contact insecticide applied to the adults or a soil insecticide designed to control newly hatched grubs. Preventative soil insecticides must be applied prior to egg hatch; thus they are typically applied when BTA adults become active. Should one miss this treatment-timing opportunity, the only option is to apply a

curative control product when the grubs are detected or noticeable feeding damage has occurred. Preventative soil insecticides labeled for BTA include imidacloprid (Merit[®]) and halofenozide (Mach 2[®]). Curative insecticides labeled for control of BTA include carbaryl (Sevin[®]) and trichlofon (Dylox[®]).

Regardless of the treatment approach or product selected, be sure to water the respective insecticide into the turf canopy with an appropriate amount of water (i.e., at least 0.25 inches of water).

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