HOT TOPICS

Survey tracks spread of Ambrosia beetle

by James E. Guyette
Contributing Editor

COLLEGE STATION, Texas—The Asia ambrosia beetle is creating havoc in several nurseries in East Texas. This spring the pest did a minimum $5,000 damage in one nursery alone.

"We've got a lot to learn about this insect," says Bill Ree, a Texas A&M University research entomologist.

Ree is surveying entomologists in 25 states—from Florida to Maine and as far west as Oklahoma—to determine the beetle's migration patterns.

The ambrosia beetle was first found in the United States in Charleston, S.C., in 1974. It was first indentified in Texas in 1985, and under a statewide monitoring program started in 1994, it is now seen in 41 Texas counties. Because many Texas nurseries send their stock elsewhere the impact of the beetle could be more widespread than previously believed.

The only control method specialists can recommend so far is to burn any infected trees—which is something Ree had to recently tell one nursery owner. "When you have a 5- to 6-year-old (infested) Shumard oak in a 30-gallon bucket and you have to tell her to burn it, that's pretty hard," says Ree. A tree like that can retail for as much as $250, he says.

The pest attacks numerous woody plants, and its damage may be identified by the toothpick-like spines that protrude one-and-a-half inches from the host plant. These spines are the "sawdust" left after the female bores into the host to make brood galleries.

The ambrosia beetle bores horizontally into the tree, not vertically like most pests. This eventually causes more damage to the different sections or layers.

"The number of infestation sites on a host plant will determine whether it will die," Ree reports.

The pest has been found in Shumard oak, burr oak, chinquapin, red bud, Chinese pistachio, Mexican plum, golden raintree, Bradford pear, and pecan trees.

Ree can be reached at (409) 845-6800.

Musser names major scholarship winner: UM's Paul Johnson

SHARON CENTER, Ohio—The Musser International Turfgrass Foundation has awarded Paul G. Johnson $6,000 toward pursuit of a Ph.D. degree in horticulture from the University of Minnesota.

"This kind of award indeed reminds me of the kind of support the turfgrass industry has for students like myself," says Johnson. "In my mind, no other industry group shows this kind of support.

"I also look forward to showing my appreciation by serving this great bunch of people in any way that I can."

Johnson, 30, would like to teach and to conduct research in turfgrass breeding and genetics. His doctoral thesis is on "Genetics and Physiology of Flowering on Selected *Poa Annua L.*"

Professor Burton Musser, for whom the scholarship is named, was a turfgrass pioneer for four decades at Penn State University, according to foundation president Frank Dobie. "The foundation is dedicated to promoting that same kind of pioneering individual," he says.

Over the past seven years, $63,000 in scholarships has been awarded.

New study backs no-risk studies on golf of the past

BELLE GLADE, Fla.—Avid duffers are not at risk from pesticides applied religiously to golf courses, according to a new study from the USGA and 11 universities, including the University of Florida.

"From the pesticides that we have studied, there's not much danger for the golfer," says soil chemist George Snyder of Florida's Institute of Food and Ag Sciences (IFAS) at Everglades Research and Education Center. "We think it's really minimal, based on what we've seen so far."

Snyder and his colleagues, including chemist Curtis Elliott, began a $2.7 million, USGA-funded environmental study three years ago.

He and turfgrass scientist John Cisar conducted their study on a specially-constructed USGA-specified green. In one phase of their work, they determined the amount of pesticide residue left on used golf shoes, golf pants and on golf balls. As part of their studies, the scientists walked around the course, knelt on the grass, and even putted balls. They also measured what amounts of pesticides remained in the soil and in runoff groundwater.

"We concluded that most organophosphate insecticides are strongly absorbed into the golf courses' thick thatch layer," says Snyder. "Even less of the pesticide penetrated into the soil and very little seeped into the percolated water."