

# Kansas State University Extension Entomology Newsletter

For Agribusinesses, Applicators, Consultants, Extension Personnel & Homeowners

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**April 10, 2020 No 1**

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"Bugs" That Eat Toilet Paper  
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## "Bugs" That Eat Toilet Paper

For those of you that have been stocking-up on the toilet paper during the COVID-19 crisis I have some bad news...there are insects ("bugs") that will actually feed on toilet paper. Some insects actually have an affinity for toilet paper that may be related to the "softness," which makes it easier for the insects to chew on the toilet paper sheets. One of these insects is the silverfish [Order: Zygentoma (Thysanura)], which is grayish-white, segmented, elongated, and approximately 3/4 inches (19 mm) long. Silverfish have two antennae that move back and forth in motion and there are three long tails or bristles protruding from the back of the abdomen. In addition to silverfish, cockroaches, termites, and booklice may occasionally enjoy munching on toilet paper sheets. Silverfish will start feeding on the outer edges of the toilet paper and move inward.

Most people keep their stockpile of toilet paper in the basement. However, this is a prime environment for silverfish development and reproduction since, in general, basements are humid and damp. The higher the humidity, the faster silverfish will develop and reproduce. In general, the life cycle (egg to adult) takes three to four months. Toilet paper that is stacked on shelves next to a wall provides a nice "buffet" for silverfish.

By the way, the guns and ammunition that are stockpiled will not provide any assistance against toilet paper eating "bugs." However, below are ways to protect your valuable toilet paper from silverfish and other "bugs:"

1. Keep all toilet paper in the original packaging.

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2. Place toilet paper in PVC tubes similar to the ones used for drainage that will allow you to stack the toilet paper rolls on top of each other. Be sure to seal both ends to exclude silverfish and other “bugs” from getting at the toilet paper.
3. Place toilet paper in a heavy-duty plastic garbage container with a tight-sealing lid. In addition, you can place mothballs in the bottom of the container to repel any “bugs.”
4. Place toilet paper in heavy-duty Tupperware containers with tight-sealing lids. Again, placing mothballs inside may help to repel any “bugs” from munching on the rolls of toilet paper.
5. Place diatomaceous earth (DE) around stacks of toilet paper to create a barrier. However, make sure there are no gaps in the barrier that silverfish or other “bugs” can get through. If a silverfish or even a cockroach tries to cross the DE barrier, their cuticle will be ruptured leading to a loss of water (dehydration)...and they will die!

Well, I hope this article will help everyone to sustain the usefulness of their toilet paper so that when you have to go...you do not find out too late...that a silverfish or other “bug” has enjoyed your toilet paper before you can use it!

Raymond Cloyd

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## ALFALFA WEEVILS

Alfalfa weevil activity has increased significantly in the last week throughout North Central Kansas. The recent warm weather has really stimulated egg hatch thus there are large numbers of very small 1st instar larvae just starting to feed, plus older, larger larvae (fig. 1) that have been feeding for a week or so. However, some fields have very low infestation levels, while others have already reached the 100% infested level. Recent freezing temperatures appeared to have killed some top growth in some fields, which can be mistaken for insect damage.



Figure 1. Various size alfalfa weevil larvae (by Cayden Wyckoff)

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Thus, sampling each field is always prudent, but even more so this year. We have gotten many questions recently about the predicted cold weather and its effect on the weevils, but remember, alfalfa weevils are cool weather insects. Temperatures into the mid 20's for a couple hours may kill small larvae, as we saw in 2018, but probably won't affect the eggs or adults. Then, anytime the temperatures are over about 45°F, the larvae feed and do so 24/7 as long as temperatures are above 45°F. Many fields were treated this week and probably should be whenever the treatment threshold is reached as the predicted temperatures for the next 10 days looks like it will slow the feeding activity down but probably not be cold enough to kill very many larvae. Have also gotten the question about spraying for army cutworms and that effect on alfalfa weevils. If both occur at threshold or one or the other does and you make an application of an insecticide you should get pretty good control of both. However, remember, cooler weather will slow down the effect of the insecticide.

Also, check this super neat picture of biological control at work (fig. 2). A turkey harvested by a Kansas youth hunter on 6 April had a crop completely filled with large army cutworm larvae.



Figure 2. Wild Turkey crop filled with large ACW larvae

Jeff Whitworth

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## APHIDS

Every field sampled throughout North Central Kansas last week had pea aphids (fig. 3) and many had scattered infestations of cowpea aphids. Pea aphids are usually considered more of a cool weather insect while cowpea aphids more of a warmer (i.e. later in the season) insect, so that just illustrates the weather roller coaster we have been experiencing this spring. Treatment recommendations for pea aphids will probably work for cowpea aphids and/or mixed populations, which calls for 50+ aphids/stem, to justify an insecticide application.



Figure 3. Pea Aphids (by Cayden Wyckoff)

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## TICKS

Well, it is that time of year already--ticks (fig. 4) are out and about searching for a blood meal. So, just be aware and take the appropriate tick avoidance precautions while enjoying the great outdoors. Remember, to remove an attached tick it is recommended to use something like needle nosed tweezers or forceps. Grab the tick by its abdomen and pull with a constant pressure, but not so much that you pull the tick apart, but a gentle constant pressure until it releases its grip. Then put the tick in a small bottle of clear alcohol or freeze, if no rubbing alcohol is available, so you can keep this specimen. Then if you develop flu-like symptoms in the next couple of weeks or the site of the bite becomes red and inflamed you need to take the specimen and visit your health care provider.



Figure 4. Wood Tick (by Matt Morris)

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## Identify This Insect

"Each newsletter will feature an image with an identification related question (spiders, insects and maybe a few plants). The answer will be featured in the next newsletter, so check back to see if you were correct and learn something along the way."

**Can you identify this insect and comment a plant it can found on?**



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Sincerely,

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