

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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It has been another interesting year so far. Just like past years, there have been many different yard and garden questions. A couple of the more interesting questions dealt with two insects that were recently brought into the office. The first involved bird mites and the second was the northern masked chafer.

Let's start with the bird mites. There are several species of mites which include the northern fowl mite (very common), the chicken mite, the American bird mite and many others. These mites are parasites on birds and are usually found on the birds or in their nests. Thus, under normal circumstances, bird mites go unnoticed. However, on occasion, bird mites wander away from the bird nests and are found indoors as accidental invaders.

Migration by bird mites is common in late spring when the baby birds are leaving the nest. Mites that migrate away from the nests may be found anywhere in houses and buildings, but are most abundant in the vicinity of nests that were built on or in the house or other structures. Sparrows, starlings and pigeons are the birds most often associated with bird mite infestations in buildings.

Bird mites can bite humans but are not a health threat. They are mostly a nuisance and annoyance. Bird mites do not attack nor harm stored foods, plants or household furnishings. They will probably infest pet birds.

Finding and eliminating bird nests on and in the house or building is the first step in bird mite control. This can be followed by spraying residual insecticides in the area of the bird nest as well as in the vicinity of where the invaders have been most noticed. Spray cracks, crevices and corners but not counters, cupboards and other such general areas. Read and follow label directions.

The other insect brought into the office is a member of a large group of insects known as scarab beetles. The northern masked chafer, which is about one half inch long and light tan color, emerges in late June and can be often be seen circling a light. They may on occasion find their way into a dwelling but pose no risk to people or furnishings.

Their damage is confined to turf grass where the larvae feed on plant roots. The larvae are known as the annual white grub. They complete their life cycle in a single year. Damage first appears as wilting and tan discoloration in the lawn. Later in the summer, small discolored patches to large irregular dead areas may appear. If you see these signs, pull back sod in these areas to confirm that grubs are feeding on the grass roots. Areas of damage often occur near a light which tends to attract the female beetle at night. To help reduce damage, turn the lights off at night when the beetles are numerous and active.

For more information, contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.