Pest e-alerts

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Shorttailed Cricket Activity Increasing in Home Lawns

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The recent September rains have triggered activity by shorttailed crickets, *Anurogryllus arboreus*, in home lawns throughout Oklahoma. The arrival of these minor nuisance pests is heralded by the appearance of loose, pelleted mounds of soil in turfgrass (Figure 1). These structures somewhat resemble crayfish tubes or earthworm castings, yet they are entrances to the burrows of shorttailed crickets. The mounds may be unsightly, but these strange creatures are considered minor pests of turfgrass since their nocturnal feeding damage to grass blades goes unnoticed.

Figure 1. Mounds created by shorttailed crickets in Oklahoma lawns and other landscapes. Photos by Eric Rebek, Oklahoma State University.

Description

These crickets are similar to field crickets except for the short ovipositor (i.e., egg-laying organ found on females), which gives rise to their common name. Adults are brown and measure about 1/2 to 3/4 inch long (Figure 2). Shorttailed crickets shed their hindwings soon after becoming adults, and

thus these are non-flying insects. The light brown nymphs are smaller than adults and lack wings entirely.

Life Cycle

Shorttailed crickets overwinter as immatures (nymphs) in burrows belowground. These insects molt several times in early spring before becoming adults. Mated females begin to lay eggs in late spring or early summer. Hatching takes place in a multi-chambered burrow constructed by the adult. For a short period of time, both eggs and nymphs may be found in the burrow. Between the fourth and sixth instars (i.e., nymphal stages), nymphs leave the parent burrows and construct burrows of their own. At first the burrows are small, but they are enlarged as the crickets mature and may reach depths of 12 to 20 inches. Only one cricket is found per burrow except in parental burrows containing eggs and nymphs. There is one generation per year.

Figure 2. Adult shorttailed cricket. Photo by Rick Grantham, Oklahoma State University.

Hosts

Shorttailed crickets feed on grasses, weeds, pine cones, and pine seedlings. They are seldom seen because they forage at night. As mentioned above, they cause very little damage to turfgrass.

Damage

Burrows are constructed by nymphs and adults, resulting in unsightly mounds of small soil pellets, which may smother the surrounding grass. In Oklahoma, they are seldom noticed until the maturing nymphs begin to construct new burrows. This is usually sometime in August and continues through October, although shorttailed crickets also become active in spring as they emerge from hibernation. Burrows may reappear in the landscape each time they are washed away by rain.

Inspection and Control

Look for mounds of small soil pellets or soil deposits similar to those constructed by crayfish or earthworms. Treatment provides only partial control and is seldom needed unless large numbers of mounds are encountered. If treatment is attempted, a contact insecticide that is registered for late summer or fall control of white grubs and other soil insects will reduce numbers of shorttailed crickets (see OCES publications E-832 or CR-7195). A simple, non-chemical method of management is to knock down mounds with a rake or other tool.

References

Vittum, P.J., M.G. Villani, and H. Tashiro. 1999. Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada, 2nd Edition. Cornell University Press.

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