

Seasonal ladybug swarms pester even bug experts

October 22 2009, By JIM SUHR , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Pest-control specialist Gene Scholes even gets bugged by them - legions of ladybugs lately swarming his rural Missouri home and other stretches across the country, exploiting gaps in door and window seals for cozier climes inside.

Bug experts say the Asian lady beetles, considered harbingers of good luck in many cultures, are making their seasonal appearance in droves in search of warmth for the approaching winter.

The beetles are harmless to humans. That doesn't make them any less annoying for folks like Scholes.

"Every night when I get home and it's dark, I turn on the lights and I have them to greet me. A lot of them," said Scholes, an entomologist for Reliable [Pest Solutions](#) in Quincy, Ill.

Thousands of them have congregated since Sunday outside his home near Hannibal, Mo. Dozens more have weaseled their way inside, he said, "and when they get in my space like that, that's when they bother me."

Their fate? Scholes' [vacuum cleaner](#).

The beetle swarms tend to be heaviest on warm days after a period of cooler weather, Scholes and other insect experts said.

Where the beetles swarm can vary wildly, according to experts. The bugs have been especially thick in recent weeks in parts of Illinois, possibly because of this year's abundance of soybean aphids on which the beetles feasted, said Phil Nixon, a University of Illinois extension entomologist.

"Based on casual observation, many think we haven't had this many Asian lady beetles before," he said.

The beetles are particularly drawn to light-colored buildings with sunny exposures as they look for a warm place where they can ride out the winter. "Basically they just shut down," said Collin Wamsley, an entomologist with the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

The ladybugs aren't venomous but at times bite humans, leaving a red mark as they test a person's fitness as a possible meal. And "people don't like them because they smell bad," the result of their stinky ability to reflexively bleed to ward off birds and other predators, Nixon said.

Some accounts of recent infestations resemble something out of an Alfred Hitchcock film.

In Lincoln, Mass., Margit Griffith told Boston television station WCVB that just a day after she saw no signs of ladybugs, she returned home Tuesday to find her home teeming with them - on the windows, on the clapboard, under the eaves.

"All of a sudden, I looked out the window and there were about 100 ladybugs - or what I am assuming were ladybugs - on my son's window," she said. "So I ran to my daughter's room and there were about 100 ladybugs there."

Across the border in Canada, Carolyn Weaver did a double-take Tuesday when she checked her mail and saw the bugs clustered outside her home

near Toronto.

"I thought I was going crazy. I've never seen so many of them in a group like that before," the Toronto Star quoted her as saying. "They just looked so beautiful - like some ladybug conference - because of the red color against my black door."

Controlling the beetles starts with prevention, including sealing areas where pipes or dryer vents enter the home, according to the University of Illinois extension's Web site. Caulking around doors, windows and chimneys - as well as repairing tears in screens and keeping siding in good repair - also may help.

Smashing the insects against furniture or drapes can stain, and crushed beetles stink. Scholes and others suggest using a vacuum cleaner to collect the bugs, then emptying it outside.

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