

Team uses wasps to monitor exotic Joro spider

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University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences researchers are reaching out to citizen scientists to find nests of the black and yellow mud dauber wasp (*Sceliphron caementarium*) – also known as the “dirt dauber” -- in northeastern Georgia. Scientists hope to use these wasps to help them track the spread of the newly introduced Joro spider in the area. Credit: UF/IFAS

University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences researchers are reaching out to citizen scientists to find nests of the black and yellow mud dauber wasp (*Sceliphron caementarium*) – also known as the "dirt dauber"—in northeastern Georgia.

"Mud dauber wasps are harmless to humans, but they hunt spiders," said Lisa Anne Taylor, an assistant research scientist in the UF/IFAS entomology and nematology department. The wasps capture, paralyze and pack spider prey into a mud nest for their offspring to eat. The wasps build their nests under the eaves of homes, barns and bridges, where they are sheltered from the elements.

Scientists hope to use these wasps to help them track the spread of the newly introduced Joro spider in the area.

"The Joro spider is a large, colorful spider from Asia that was discovered in the United States in 2014 by scientists at the University of Georgia," Taylor said. So far, the spiders have only been recorded in three counties in northeastern Georgia, but researchers suspect they occur even more widely. To help track the spread of this species, Taylor's group has teamed up with UGA scientists Rick Hoebeke and Robert Matthews.

By examining the paralyzed spider prey in mud dauber nests, scientists recently discovered that mud daubers collect these exotic Joro spiders to feed their young. Mud daubers are often even better than scientists at finding spiders, capturing up to 25 spiders in a day. So, as researchers document the spread of this exotic spider species, they need the daubers' help, and they need citizen scientists to find more dauber nests. "This is an opportunity to help real-world scientific research and help researchers understand a biological invasion that may be going on in your backyard," Taylor said. "We are specifically looking for the clumpy mud nests of

the black and yellow mud dauber, as they are actively being built."

If you spot a mud dauber nest matching this description in northeastern Georgia, please visit the researchers' Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/558114621038964/>, post a picture, and they will add your nest(s) to their map. More information on black and yellow mud daubers, including tips on recognizing and identifying them, can be found here:

http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/MISC/WASPS/Sceliphron_caementarium.htm.

Provided by University of Florida

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