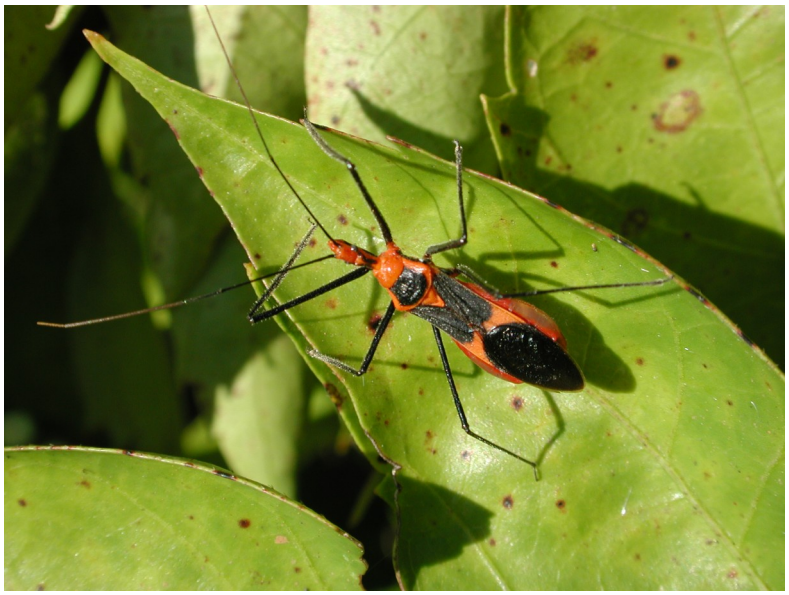
PESKY SALT MARSH MOSQUITOES

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



The milkweed assassin bug (pictured left) is a beneficial insect commonly found in Galveston County and often mistaken with the leaf footed bug which is a major insect pest. Jessica Weizer will provide a presentation about Beneficial Insects in the Garden and Landscape on Tuesday, August 6, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office.

PHOTO BY Herman Auer

July 31, 2013

Guest Columnist

Jessica Weizer is completing a summer internship on horticulture at the Galveston County AgriLife A&M Extension Office. On August 19, 2013 Jessica will assume the position of horticulturist with the Nueces County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.

My name is Jessica Weizer and I am a 2013 graduate of Texas A&M University where I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Entomology (the study of insects). In August, I will be assuming the position of County Extension Agent-Horticulture at the Nueces County AgriLife Extension Office in Corpus Christi. In preparation for my new position, I have been serving as an intern under Dr. William Johnson at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in La Marque.

Dr. Johnson has put me through a relentless but quite enjoyable Real-life Horticulture Training 101 asking me "What is that plant?", "What is wrong with this plant?", "What is that plant disease?" "What is that insect pest?" This has been an excellent on-the-job learning experience. On my first day to the office a few weeks ago, I was greeted by an insect pest that I already knew way too much about.

Honestly there were hordes of salt marsh mosquitoes that seemed to waiting in line to greet me outside my car door and it quickly became clear this was not going to be a "let's give a warm welcome to the newcomer to the office" gathering. Since I will have similar horticultural responsibilities in Nueces County that Dr. Johnson has here in Galveston County, he suggested that I write a guest column on our pesky adversaries.

This troublesome insect pest that we are facing right now is the black salt marsh mosquito, otherwise known as *Aedes taeniorhynchus* (also known as *Ochlerotatus sollicitans*. These pesky insects are especially troubling to those who enjoy gardening, grilling or just spending leisure time outdoors.

Salt marsh mosquitoes are relatively small in size, very dark grey or black in color and can sometimes be referred to as the "salt and pepper mosquito" because of the combination of the light and dark scales covering its body. They have five thin bands of white scales on each leg as well as on the uppermost surface of the abdominal segments, and one located in the center of the proboscis.

Due to the rise of the tides and recent rainfall salt

marsh mosquitoes numbers have increased dramatically. This mosquito is most abundant along coastal plains spanning from Texas up to Massachusetts and predominately inhabit salt or brackish marshes.

After mating, the female mosquito is on a mission to find a host to utilize as a blood meal. These mosquitoes are particularly insistent biters and can be a problem to humans, dogs, cats and livestock. Although these mosquitoes can bite at any time of the day, they are most problematic at twilight. The female black salt marsh mosquitoes are the ones who take a blood meal; the male mosquitoes do not.

Once the blood meal has been acquired, the female mosquito will lay a batch of 100 to 200 eggs one at a time, and can lay up to six batches! The eggs are deposited on the surface of mud along receding tide pools in the spring or early summer. Here in our area, the breeding of this mosquito can happen year round. The eggs will then hatch when high tides and rains flood the marsh. In some instances if the conditions are ideal, the adults can emerge in as little as six days subsequent to the hatching of the eggs.

The black salt marsh mosquito is considered to be a public health nuisance because of it being an adamant and particularly aggressive biter. Precautions should be exercised to avoid bites.

Some of these precautions for avoiding bites from black salt marsh as well as species of mosquitoes include:

• Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing or when practical, long sleeves and pants. Some mosquitoes are actually more attracted to dark colors and most can easily bite through tightly fitted clothing.

• Empty out containers that fill with water and change the water in bird baths at least once a week. Some mosquitoes don't need very much water to lay eggs in; a single, small container in a landscape can serve as a breeding ground for hundreds of mosquitoes.

• Use a mosquito repellant. There are various types, applications and brands. Find one that works for you and be sure to follow and read all directions carefully that are listed on the container.

I will likely be able to use this information in a garden column again when I move to Nueces County—salt marsh mosquitoes are just as problematic there. I wonder if they will be planning another "let's give a warm welcome to the newcomer to the office" gathering for me. I plan to wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing on my first day of work and will have my mosquito repellant ready.

At a Glance

TOPIC: Buried Treasures in the Garden . . . *Bulbs, Corms and Rhizomes*

TIME: Saturday, August 3, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.

SPEAKER: Master Gardener Anna Wygrys will provide a Power Point presentation on hardy bulbs, corms, and tubers that thrive in the Southern gardens of the Upper Gulf Coast of Texas.

TOPIC: Beneficial Insects in the Garden and Landscape

TIME: Tuesday, August 6, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

SPEAKER: Entomologist Jessica Weizer will discuss beneficial insects commonly found in Galveston County and what attracts them. I will also be touching on some common pests.

PLACE: Both programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B Main Street in La Marque). Pre-register by e-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 12).