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Unrecognized Hero **Leo R. Winburn, REH, CHESP**

Director of Housekeeping, United States Forces Hospital, Baghdad, Iraq



The Lady is a Tramp

by Ted Snyder

“I remember what lady bugs were like when I was growing up,” someone said to me just a few days back, “but these lady bugs are different.”

It’s all too common of a story — the lady bug, or rather, the Asian Lady Beetle (ALB), has soured the reputation of this once good bug. Perhaps Frank Sinatra was prophetic when he sang that “The Lady is a Tramp.” This tramp, however, is not just an annoyance, and controlling them in a building is almost as important as controlling cockroaches.

Accidentally released in Louisiana in the late 1980s, the ALB has spread through much of the

Midwest, Northwest, and Northeast. Populations explode during the summer months, and when fall comes, they look for a place to hibernate en masse. Too often, their choice of hibernation sites are the wall voids and attics in our structures. The result is annoyance and irritation. After all, the lady is a tramp.

But, there’s more than just that. The big problem with the ALB is that they detract from indoor air quality. You see, when they die, and if you have them, dead ones will be inside those wall voids and attic areas mentioned earlier, and their bodies will begin to decompose and release proteins into the



Asian Lady Beetles are easy to recognize. On the white area in front of the red wing covers, look for a black “W.” This can be easy to remember if you just tell yourself that they are Wisconsin Badger college football fans!

air. Studies have found that over 30 percent of people have an allergic response to these proteins. That means that ALB allergies are as common as cat allergies.

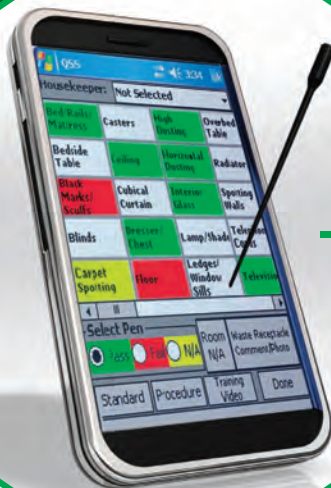
If you’ve dealt with the ALB in a structure, you’re probably aware of many of the other problems they present. Although most that die are inside voids and around light sources, carcasses can be found in many other areas — chairs,

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ASIAN LADY BEETLE

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furniture, flooring, and even cabinetry, potentially contaminating food items and cookware. Most people find these dead ALBs to be a nuisance.

In addition, the live beetles cause their own problems. When you try to vacuum or pick them up, they have a tendency to bleed. It's a defensive response to deal with predators like birds, and their blood is smelly and foul tasting. (Or so I'm told. Fortunately, I don't have personal experience!) A vacuum cleaner attachment coming to suck them up can resemble a bird's beak coming to swallow them up. Unfortunately, the blood also stains, and it's not uncommon to find little dark spots on walls where they've been gathering. The ALB is also known for biting people. They don't cause any harm beyond a pinch, but it still isn't pleasant to have a small insect biting you.

The ALB also attract other pests to your building. As their carcasses sit in your wall voids, decaying and shedding allergens into your airspace, decay beetles, called dermestids, come in to feed upon the carcasses. The problem is, the dermestids also enter the living area in search of more food. This is a nuisance, and one very hard to control. The dermestids can also infest dried, stored food products, such as flour, pasta, and so forth, as well as animal mounts.

Recently, I was touring a high-end hotel that had been closed down for the winter, and it was a textbook case for ALB infestation. Dead beetles lined the windows, with a handful of carcasses elsewhere. Dermestids were scattered around as well. It made me wonder how many of their guests struggle with allergies while staying there, unaware that the problem is not pollen, but rather the building's beetle problem festering inside the walls. The housekeeping staff

wanted a solution to the ALB problem (they were unaware of the dermestids — I guess the kitchen hadn't reported any infestations, or they had gone unnoticed, and had been cooked into some meals). How do you break the news to them that, although you can prevent future infestations, to solve the problem completely — including the air quality and dermestid issues, both of which are subtle enough that people normally don't realize they have a problem — you're going to have to open up the void areas inside the walls and find and remove the carcasses?

Preventing Asian Lady Beetle Problems

The most economical way to control an ALB infestation is prevention. In the early fall, when beetles first start showing up on the exterior of your building, a pesticide can be applied to the surfaces they land upon and the structural openings they use to get inside. Your state cooperative extension agent (visit www.extension.org) can give you an approximate date for when this happens each year in your state. If the pesticide is applied too soon, before the beetles begin to come to your structure, its effects will be diminished. If it is applied after they have been seen on the outside of your structure for too long, then some will have already gone inside. Timing is everything.

A more Green approach is to caulk, screen, and otherwise seal off all the small openings on the exterior of your structure. Any gap more than 1/16 inch will allow them access. For most facilities, this form of control is cost prohibitive.

Control Once ALB are Inside

If you're trying to control ALB once they've gained entry to your building, oftentimes the options remaining are much less effective.

First, the most common approach is to vacuum them up as you see them. This applies to both dead and live ones. Remember the proteins mentioned earlier? To keep these allergens out of the air, you need to use a vacuum with a HEPA filter. Throw away the bag if you've picked up any live ones so they don't find a way out of the vacuum.

Second, insect light traps — think of a bug zapper — can be put in places where ALB are being seen. They put off UV light, which is extremely effective at attracting ALB. Also, unlike the hardware store variety bug zappers, professional insect light traps come in styles that can be rather discrete, allowing you to put them out and not draw the attention of your staff or guests.

Third, pesticides can be applied to areas where beetles are being seen indoors, such as windowsills, and areas where they may be exiting the wall voids. Sometimes these treatments can be effective. Oftentimes, they provide mediocre results.

Considering the problems caused by the ALB and the treatment options available, facilities should have a zero-tolerance policy for this pest. If your building is LEED®-certified, caters to a high-end clientele, or has residents with lowered immune systems, then this applies even more so. In Frank Sinatra's day, it was proper to hold a door open for a lady, but this lady is a tramp. ♦

Ted Snyder, BS, ME, is a Training & Technical Services Manager and Urban Entomologist for Batzner Pest Management, Inc., located in New Berlin, Wisconsin. He may be reached at teds@batzner.com.