

PestGazette

WINTER 2014

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Pigeon Pests

During the winter months, you might find yourself daydreaming about spending a lazy afternoon in the park feeding the pigeons. But before you let your imagination run away with you, it's important to know that the prolific pigeon can also be a pest.

Pigeons, also known as Rock Doves, are filthy birds, causing disease and damage. Their droppings are known for triggering human slips and falls, as well as accelerating the aging of structures and statues. This makes it imperative to get rid of pigeons in highly trafficked areas. More seriously, pigeons may carry diseases such as cryptococcosis, toxoplasmosis, salmonella, food poisoning, and more. Also, their droppings may harbor the growth

of fungus which causes histoplasmosis. Other pests may live on these birds, including fleas, lice, mites, ticks, and other pests.

Pigeons prefer grains for food and people will commonly feed pigeons unintentionally by spilling food or it in open trash containers. Pigeons roost in areas above ground and will readily nest in steeples, as well as voids on outside areas of buildings and other protected areas.

Pigeons are dependent on humans to provide them with food, roosting and nesting sites. They are commonly found around agricultural areas as well as warehouses, feed mills, and grain elevators. They are also commonly found in cities around parks, buildings, bridges, and any other structures.

Brown Dog Tick



Ticks are a public health concern across much of the North America. You might feel that by taking the correct precautions while venturing into tick-infested landscapes, like grasslands and forests, and performing thorough inspections once you have returned, that you do not have to give much thought to ticks. Unfortunately, there is a type of tick that actually prefers living indoors! The brown dog tick, scientific name *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, has a worldwide distribution and can be found throughout the United States, though it is more common in warmer places as it cannot survive harsh winters.

Brown dog ticks have a very different appearance depending on whether they have recently fed. Unfed adults are small, less than 1/8 inch long,

while fully engorged ticks can reach 1/2 inch! Unfed adults are reddish-brown and lack any distinct markings or ornamentation. Low levels of brown dog ticks can be very hard to detect and ticks found on pets or humans may be wrongly identified as another type of tick.

Ticks have a life cycle that requires them to feed (consume the blood of) different animal hosts at different stages. Ticks begin their life as an egg, which hatches into larva which needs to feed before it can continue to develop. Each life stage of a tick will feed on a host until it is engorged and then drop off of the host to molt. Larvae develop into nymphs and then into adult ticks. Ticks are often referred to *continued on page 2*

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Ticks are brought into the home on pets and can be very hard to detect until eggs, which are laid by the hundreds or thousands, hatch and the larvae start looking for blood.

Brown Dog Tick (continued from page 1)

as a three-host tick or four-host tick, depending on how many different times they will feed throughout their life.

Brown dog ticks are three-host ticks and unsurprisingly, this tick prefers to feed on dogs! However, in the absence of dogs, these ticks will readily feed on other mammals, including humans. Brown dog ticks often attach themselves to dogs at kennels and other places where high numbers of dogs are found and when the dog is brought home, the unwanted guests come with them! Any treatment of pets is the responsibility of the owner and/or the veterinarian, not your pest management professional. Once these ticks are in your home, they can be very hard to detect until eggs, which are laid by the hundreds or thousands, hatch and larvae start looking for blood. Under the right conditions, the life cycle can be completed in two months!

Homes are full of cracks, crevices, and other great hiding places for these ticks and their tremendous reproductive potential can quickly result in a massive infestation. The complicated biology and behavior of these blood-feeders makes them especially difficult to control and a pest management professional should be contacted. Infestations will not go away on their own and brown dog ticks can wait up to three months without feeding, so a vigilant

approach to monitoring after treatment is very important. Pest management professionals will pay close attention to the places where all life stages of ticks may be found, as well as places frequented by the dog(s), so call us today! ■

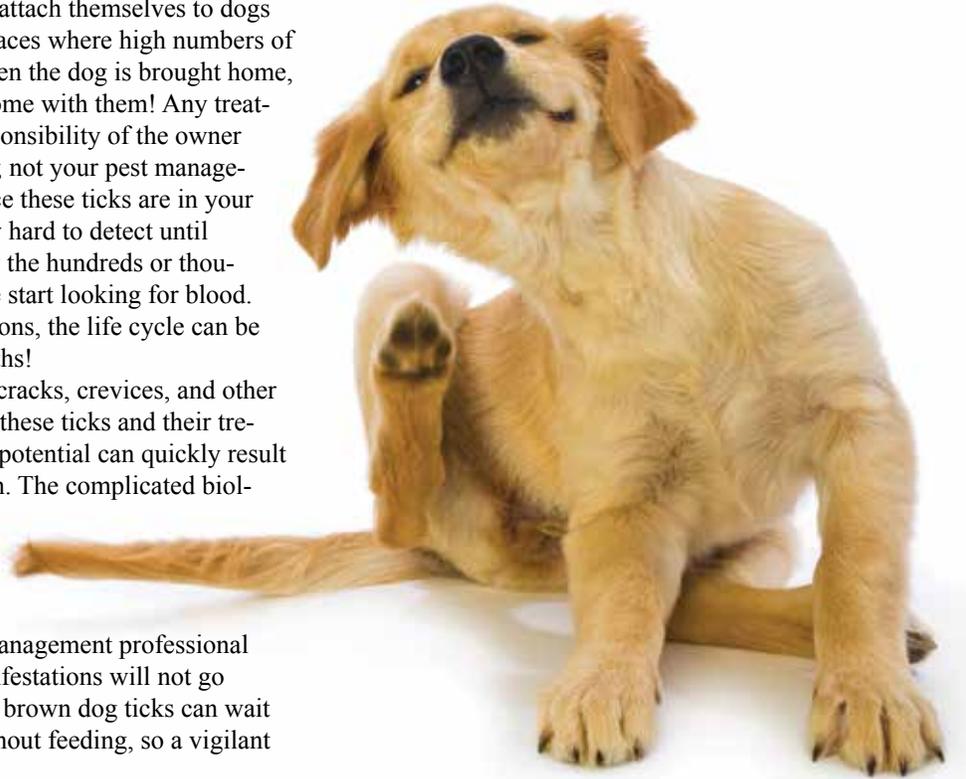


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Rock Crawlers

Winter is the time of year when insects fade away from your thoughts ... and from your yard. You no longer hear the chirping of crickets, or the buzzing of honeybees, and the cold weather has forced the flowers (and the butterflies) from your garden.

But for one group of insects, cold, winter weather is exactly what they love! Rock crawlers, or ice bugs, thrive in cold weather, especially at high elevations. In fact, these odd-looking bugs, have a hard time surviving at temperatures greater than 50 degrees. For years, insects were not thought

to be able to live in such a harsh environment so rock crawlers went undetected until 100 years ago. Rock crawlers scavenge for food under rocks, in snow fields, and around melting ice. These insects are found in snowy and icy regions of the western United States and across Canada. Although you are unlikely to come across one of these amazing insects unless you are a mountain climber, keep your eyes open and remember that while you may like to spend your winters bundled up by a fire, there are some insects out there loving every minute of the ice and snow! ■



Earwigs

Earwigs have a frightening reputation to many. The name 'earwig' comes from a completely untrue tale about these insects burrowing into the ears of unsuspecting humans. If this story had any truth to it, these insects would be priority number one! The scientific name for earwig, *Dermaptera*, translates into skin-wing, due to the leathery appearance of the short, non-functional wings present in many earwigs.

In addition to a misleading name, earwigs have two pincer-like appendages on their tail-end, which look like fierce skin-piercing weapons! It is true that these cerci are used for both offensive and defensive purposes, but they are not suited for nor intended for attacking humans.

Earwigs are reddish brown to black in color, slender and range in length from $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to 1 inch. These insects are nocturnal, so you may tend to notice them at night. This omnivorous insect will eat fruit, flowers, fungi, leaves in addition to capturing flies and other small insects with their pincers. Due to their predatory behavior, some earwig species are considered beneficial to humans, despite how scary they might seem!

Earwigs prefer to live in dark, damp places like under tree bark, beneath stones and in the leaf

litter. Those habitats are often found right around your home, and as such, earwigs do occasionally find their way inside your home. Earwigs may overwinter inside your house as it is a warm and protected environment with ample moisture. Earwigs like to group together with other earwigs in primitively social aggregations, an unsettling thought for many. Earwigs secrete a special chemical called an aggregation pheromone that attracts other earwigs to come and join them. If you find earwigs inside, it is best to physically remove them from your house so they cannot continue to chemically attract others to that location.

The best way to limit earwigs is through a process called integrated pest management. This means that the specific biology and behavior of the pest is taken into account to develop the best control strategy. For earwigs, limiting the places earwigs like to hide, controlling places that have excessive moisture, and sealing cracks and crevices between the outside world and your home is a good place to start. In addition, we can help target earwigs in places where they are harboring and treat the perimeter of your home to contact earwigs that may be on their way inside, so please call us today! ■



Ewwwww!
Earwigs secrete a pheromone that attracts other earwigs.



Rats transmit disease, damage property, and cause emotional distress.

Preventing rats from coming in your house and eliminating those present is important and should be made a top priority.

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The Secret Life of Norway Rats

Rats. The word alone conjures up fears of scratching sounds coming from inside walls, filthy kitchens, and disease. There are two common rats found in the United States, the Norway rat and the black (roof) rat. The Norway rat is a large, robust-bodied rodent that is considered the most important pest rat across much of the world. From nose to tip of the tail, which is short in relation to the body, this rat averages 16 inches long and weighs 3/4 pound. However, there have been Norway rats captured that have reached 19 inches long and 1.8 pounds!

Fur ranges in color from reddish brown to dark gray and due to high variation, fur color is not a reliable way to tell one rat from another. Norway rats have small ears but have excellent sense of hearing, tasting, touch and smell, and although their eyes are prominent, Norway rats have a poor sense of sight and are color blind. Rats are what is called 'crepuscular' creatures, which means they are active around sunset and sunrise, but not during the day or the middle of the night. Norway rats are exceptional leapers, runners, swimmers, and are capable of climbing pipes, bricks and tree trunks.

Contrary to its name, the Norway rat is originally from eastern Asia but was readily spread by human

movement over the last few centuries. The Norway rat is especially adept at living with humans and thrives in urban and rural settings. In fact, the way that a rat behaves is strongly tied to the type of environment in which it is living. This makes it difficult to describe rat behavior in a straightforward way. In general, Norway rats dig burrows into soil to use as safe havens and nesting sites. In a city, these rats exploit cracks, crevices, and holes in streets, sidewalks, and building foundations to use as burrows. Holes as small as 1 inch across may be enough to allow these rats to enter and exit burrows! Adults can produce nearly 40 offspring per year over four litters.

Preventing rats from coming into your house and eliminating those present is important and should be made a priority. Rodents transmit disease, damage property, and cause emotional distress. Managing rodent infestations is usually a combination of exclusion (sealing up places that allow rats to come in and out of your house), trapping, and baiting.

Rodents are quite crafty and complex and control of rats is a serious business that is best left to pest management professionals, so please call us if you are finding evidence of rodents in your home! ■