



NEWS



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ENVIRONMENT: Beat the invasive beetles, save the trees

Two invasive beetle species are killing trees across Southern California.

Aaron Orlowski, Press Enterprise

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John Kabashima of the UC Cooperative Extension walks through what is left of an oak tree infested with the goldspotted oak borer beetle that had to be chopped down and debarked. Paul Rodriguez, Staff Photographer

Thousands of trees across Southern California are dying because of two invasive beetles, and little can be done to combat them.

The polyphagous shot hole borer is attacking hundreds of tree species and can reproduce in 41 of them, including some of the trees most favored by gardeners, city landscape designers and universities, such as maples, elders, cottonwoods and oaks.

The first infections in the area were discovered in 2003 in the Whittier Narrows in Los Angeles County, and the beetle is believed to have caused the mass deaths of box elder trees in Long Beach in 2010. In the Inland area, the beetle has attacked trees near Martha McLean-Anza Narrows Park along the Santa Ana River and in De Anza Park in Ontario.

Now, in William R. Mason Regional Park near UC Irvine, the sycamores and willows also look sickly, with black stains caused by the beetle shotgunned across their trunks.

“We’re in an epidemic now in Southern California. We let it get away from us. This beetle fell through the cracks,” said John Kabashima, a former UC Cooperative Extension adviser who is working on beetle issues. “We don’t normally see this reaction from these trees, because we don’t have a pest like this.”

There’s no known cure, and the price tag for dealing with the pest is quickly mounting, since it costs about \$1,000 to remove a tree. Many homeowners don’t have that kind of money.

The potential damage to crops, especially avocados, is more severe. The California Avocado Commission is funding research on the beetle, and avocado groves infested by a closely related beetle in San Diego County are being monitored.

INVASIVE SPECIES

The shot hole borer infests trees that grow near waterways – often of the types city dwellers and landscape architects favor. Pregnant females land on trees, burrow holes the size of a pen tip through the bark, and dig tunnels.

The beetles bring with them a fungus that feeds on the tree’s cambium layer – between the bark and the wood. The beetles feed on the fungus, which actually does the job of killing the trees.

It takes two to three years from infection to when the tree starts to die, even though the shotgun wounds appear much sooner. Multiple generations of the minuscule beetles will live and mate in a tree until it dies, when tens of thousands of beetles take off to find new trees.

The beetle arrived in the U.S. in wood products from Southeast Asia. A monoculture of nonnative trees grown for wood products got hit by the beetle, which flourished in those uniform stands of trees.

“It could have come in on a wooden pallets for all we know. There could be hundreds of beetles in a pallet,” Kabashima said.

Another beetle – the goldspotted oak borer – is attacking stands of oak trees already weak, thirsty for water after four years of drought, in L.A., Riverside, San Diego and Orange counties. More dead trees raise the risk of wildfire during what is starting out as a summer of record-setting heat.

Together, the two beetles are creating “a contiguous swath of dead trees,” Kabashima said.

Kabashima worries that fires that feed on trees in wild areas will more easily jump to urban areas because of the dead trees there. Normally, well-watered trees along creeks and river beds act as an impediment to fire. But if those trees are hit by the beetle and die, the fire defense fades.

The goldspotted oak borer, originally from southeast Arizona, is already rampant across San Diego County, where it was discovered in 2008. Scientists believe the beetle arrived near El Cajon in the mid-1990s – a hypothesis they developed by examining tree stumps. It started to spread, aided by humans who transported the beetle in infested firewood.

The beetle soon made it to coastal San Diego County and La Jolla, then Idyllwild in Riverside County in 2012, then Orange County in 2014. In 2015, it showed up in northeast Los Angeles County, in Green Valley.

In its native home of Arizona – a place it never left for hundreds or possibly thousands of years – the beetle doesn’t pose much of a problem, since another insect that flourishes during monsoonal storms controls the beetle population. There is no such control here in Southern California.

DEAD FORESTS

In the San Bernardino Mountains and Sierra Nevada, trees are perishing en masse because of native bark beetles that have flourished during four consecutive years of drought and heat.

Since 2010, at least 66 million trees have died across the state, according to aerial surveys. And the problem is accelerating: While 40 million of those trees died between 2010 and October 2015, 26 million died in the southern Sierra Nevada alone between October and June.

“Drought is definitely a big stressor, particularly consecutive years of drought,” said Kevin Turner, who works on beetle issues for the UC Cooperative Extension. “Trees that normally pitch insects out can’t produce enough sap to push them out.”

Those native beetles are also attacking conifers, white firs and pines at higher elevations in Southern California forests, but not at nearly the same rate as in the Sierra Nevada. The vast stands of dead trees can fuel raging wildfires.

The beetles release a pheromone that draws other beetles to the tree until it succumbs, Turner said.

“That pretty much goes on until the drought ends.”

<http://www.pe.com/articles/trees-808354-beetle-county.html>

Fire causes about \$10,000 worth of damage to property in Fontana

Fontana Herald News

Posted: July 18, 2016 1:17 PM

Updated: July 18, 2016, 3:23 PM



Firefighters extinguish a fire which destroyed a shed and also singed the corner of a house in northern Fontana on July 17.

A fire which was apparently caused by a juvenile playing with matches resulted in about \$10,000 worth of damage to property in northern Fontana on July 17, according to the **San Bernardino County Fire Department**.

There were no reports of injuries as a result of the fire, which was reported at about 12:41 p.m. in the 6600 block of Catawba Avenue.

Originally a vegetation fire, the blaze started in an empty lot between two homes before spreading to a shed next door. The fire singed the corner of a home but was extinguished by firefighters before it could cause additional damage to the residence. The shed was deemed a total loss.

Investigators said a juvenile who caused the fire was cited and released.

http://www.fontanaheraldnews.com/news/fire-causes-about-worth-of-damage-to-property-in-fontana/article_a26d6ee6-4d24-11e6-b0eb-fb65b973497b.html

SAN BERNARDINO: House fire kills chihuahua, but woman, 3 children escape (UPDATE)

Richard Brooks, Press Enterprise

Posted: July 18, 2016

A San Bernardino house fire killed a pet chihuahua, but a woman and her three children escaped unharmed, say **San Bernardino County Fire Department** officials.

Mattresses and other debris apparently ignited shortly before 6 p.m. outside the home along the 200 block of 19th Street and spread to the back porch, said Battalion Chief Dan Filter.

Furniture in the back room also burned, he said.

And flames spread in the opposite direction, damaging two carports at a nearby tri-plex, but crews prevented the fire from spreading into the apartments.

The crews of four fire engines, two ladder trucks and a paramedic squad extinguished the fire at 6:29 p.m.

<http://www.pe.com/articles/blaze-808502-tri-plex.html>

Firefighters save House in Twentynine Palms

Z107.7 News

Posted: July 19, 2016

Firefighters were able to prevent a garage fire from spreading to a house Monday evening in Twentynine Palms. About 6:45 p.m., firefighters from Twentynine Palms, the Combat Center, and Joshua Tree were called to a structure fire on El Bandido near Gemini in the Desert Heights neighborhood. The garage and contents, including two vehicles and a workshop, suffered major damage, but the home only had smoke damage and no fire damage. Firefighters were on scene for about two hours. The cause is under investigation.

<http://z1077fm.com/firefighters-save-house-in-twentynine-palms/>