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EUROPEAN FIRE ANT REPORTED IN WOODLOT IN ONTARIO COUNTY

Fire ants in Ontario County. Photo credit: Hilary Mosher



The European fire ant, *Myrmica rubra* Linnaeus, native to Europe and central Asia, was recently discovered in a woodlot in Ontario County. While this invasive species has previously been detected in New York State, this is the first confirmed sighting in Ontario County. The insect resides outdoors and will not affect interior of homes. This invader extremely aggressive and can inflict painful stings to people, pets, and other animals. The ants have a large stinger that results in swelling or raised areas that last from few minutes to a few days. Because they nest in such high

densities, almost all native ant species are eliminated from areas where European fire ants become established.

On September 9th 2015, officials from Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District, Ontario County Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the FL-PRISM toured a property near Geneva, Ontario County, to determine the extent of a population that was recently reported. The European fire ant, previously identified at Cornell University, was located throughout the property; under logs, in tree stumps and throughout cracks in the ground. According to the property owner, Rich Wellington, the infestation has been on-site for at least eight years, making a rapid response to this population nearly impossible. While initial survey might miss the populations, disturbing a rotting logs or tapping at the base of tree stumps caused the populations to swarm from their nest.

The European fire ant, different from their distant cousin the “true” fire ants (*Solenopsis species*), an invader in the southern United States and Latin America, has been reported throughout the eastern United States and in Western NYS. Management is best when the populations are small and must continue for several seasons. Because the population in



Fire ants in Ontario County. Photo credit: Hilary Mosher

Ontario County has been established for nearly a decade, according to local sources, it is impossible to eliminate the ants from the areas that have been invaded. There are however, ways in which you can manage the ants on your property and make sure to keep a watchful eye for a new invader if your property is free from the ant. For more information on identification of the European fire ant and management techniques, see links below.

Fire ants in Ontario County. Photo credit: Hilary Mosher



Prevention

Know where the current infestations occur and how close it is to your property. The European fire ant prefers moist conditions and often makes nests in rotting logs and wood. Check your property and tap on the side of a stump and watch for ants swarming. BE CAREFUL to stand back and protect yourself from being stung by wearing rubber boots, gloves, and cover your skin.

Insecticides

SAFETY FIRST! Read the label and directions before applying any chemical. Contact a certified insecticide applicator for more information on using chemicals to control the European fire ant and refer to the resources below.

Together we can #stoptheinvasion. Know what to look for and how to report any suspect invasive species. Check out the fingerlakesinvasives.org website for this organism or others. Be an invasive detector!

For more information, refer to the following resources:

European fire ant fact sheet: <http://fireants.umaine-biology.org/files/EFAfactsheet.pdf>

European fire ant website and information: <http://fireants.umaine-biology.org/information/>

European fire ant management techniques: http://fireants.umaine-biology.org/files/Mrubra_mgmt%202007.pdf