Other Wood-Destroying Insects

Carpenter Ants

The carpenter ant, *Camponotus* spp., (Figure 35) occurs widely in the United States and is one of the largest of our common ants. The adults vary in length from 1/4-inch for small workers to 3/4-inch for a queen. The body is dark brown to black in color. In Arkansas, some species are both red and black.

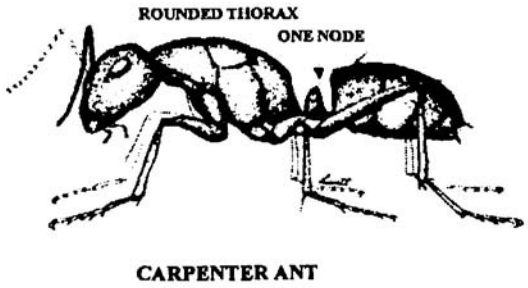

Figure 35. Carpenter ant.

Carpenter ants seek soft, generally moist wood in which to establish their nests; they particularly like wood that has weathered and begun to decay. Although the nest is most often begun in the soft wood, later excavations frequently are made into perfectly sound, dry lumber (Figure 36). Carpenter ants can be found in porch columns and roofs, windowsills, hollow core doors, wood scraps in dirt-filled slab porches and wood in contact with soil.

Figure 36. Carpenter ant damage to wood.

An infestation in a building may be started by a single fertilized female. However, many times it is started by a colony or portion of a colony moving in from another location. This is especially true in wooded areas. The queen sheds her wings when the new colony is started and remains wingless the rest of her life. The males are winged and die soon after the mating flight is over. Winged forms are usually not produced in a colony until it is at least three years old. A large colony can cause serious structural damage if not controlled.

Carpenter ants do not eat wood (in contrast with termites), but excavate galleries in the wood in which to rear their young. Carpenter ants eject the wood in the form of coarse sawdust. The characteristic sawdust piles aid in nest location. They feed on honeydew excreted by aphids, and upon other insects, animal remains and household food scraps. They are particularly fond of sweets.

The damage of carpenter ants is easily distinguished from that of termites. Their galleries are excavated without regard for the grain and follow the softer portions of the wood. The galleries are kept smooth and clean and have a sandpapered appearance. Termite galleries are not smooth and clean.

When carpenter ants are found within a structure, the colony is either nesting within the building or nesting outside the building and entering to forage for food. Houses near wooded areas are especially subject to invasion.

The key to the control of carpenter ants is locating the nest or nests, which is often difficult. If the nest or nests can be found, there is an excellent chance of controlling this pest. Eliminating nests outside may be just as important as eliminating those in buildings. In some cases, an entire colony may migrate from one nesting site to another (from a tree outdoors to structural timber indoors).

To find nests indoors, examine these locations:

- wood affected by water seepage (porch floors, roofs, porch posts and columns).
- wood in contact with soil.
- wood adjacent to dirt-filled slab porches.
- firewood piled in garages or next to a house.

Carpenter ants are usually found near moisture. Some signs of carpenter ants to look for when inspecting for a nest indoors are:

- piles of coarse “sawdust” on the floor or foundation.
- ant activity, particularly in kitchens. However, even when the nest is in a building very few ants may be seen. They are usually active at night and often forage outside.

Some of the things to look for outdoors are:

- firewood, stumps, logs and trees that might contain nests.
- trees with branches hanging over and touching the roof of a house. Ants may travel over these branches into the building.
- power and utility lines leading to the house, particularly if they pass through trees and shrubs.

Sanitation measures such as removing and destroying logs and stumps that harbor nests will help eliminate the pest. To protect structures from carpenter ants, destroy the nests in and near the structure.

Apply insecticides to the nest and nest areas. Spraying or dusting the infested area without locating and treating the nest usually does not provide complete control, and is not recommended.

Carpenter Bees

Carpenter bees, *Xylocopa* spp., are large (3/4- to 1-inch long), heavy-bodied insects (Figure 37). Their blue-black metallic bodies will have some yellow or orange hair. They resemble bumblebees, but can be distinguished by their shiny, black, hairless abdomens. The abdomen of the bumblebee is yellow and hairy. Bumblebees also have large pollen baskets on their hind legs.

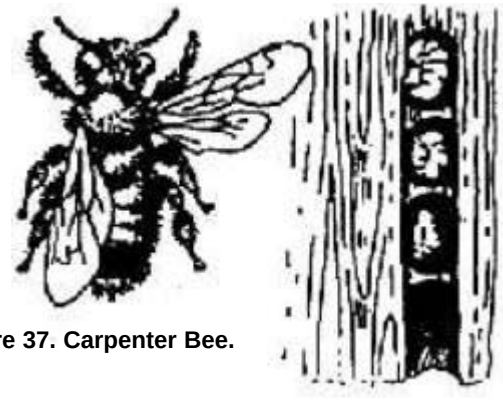

Figure 37. Carpenter Bee.

In the spring, carpenter bees become a nuisance as they fly erratically, close to homes and other buildings. Males hover like humming birds, waiting for females to emerge so they can mate. If the males are disturbed, they may hover or buzz around a person’s head. Only the female stings, and then only if molested. After the mating season, most of the summer is spent loitering around the nest or nearby flowers.

Carpenter bees are a nuisance to have around and they also bore into seasoned woods, especially soft woods such as cedar, redwood, pine and fir. Damage may occur to soft or weathered woods on porches, decks, shed ceilings, railings, overhead trim, porch furniture, dead tree limbs, fence posts, wooden shingles, wood siding, windowsills, wood doors, etc. Female bees bore circular holes, about 1/2-inch wide, into the wood at right angles to the surface for about an inch. Then they turn sharply, boring in the direction of the wood grain for 4 to 6 inches.

Structural damage caused by one or two carpenter bees is slight. However, tunnels may be used again and lengthened by other broods. The activity of numerous bees over a period of years is certain to cause some structural damage.

Carpenter bees over-winter in wood as young adults. The tunnels are made by the females. Those bees that survive the winter mate in the spring (April to June) and then begin preparation for the next brood.

Carpenter bees do not eat the wood they tunnel in, but use these tunnels for rearing the young. The female provides her tunnel-nest with “bee bread” (a mixture of pollen and regurgitated nectar), which serves as food for the larvae when the eggs hatch. She makes a cell for each larva and closes each cell with chewed wood pulp. There may be as many as six to eight cells in the tunnel. The time required to complete development from egg to adult varies from one to three months. Though newly formed adult bees usually emerge in late August, these bees will not mate to start the cycle over again until the following spring.

Painted wood is rarely attacked by carpenter bees, so keep all exposed wood surfaces well painted. Wood stains will not prevent attacks. Wood pressure treated with a preservative should be used if painting is not practical.

Treatment involves applying insecticide into the tunnel entrance. Treat the opening after dark when the bees are less active. Do not plug the holes, but allow the bees to pass freely so they can contact the insecticide. The holes should be filled a day or two later to prevent further use.