

# State and Local

## Researchers study effects of environment on roaches

By Mary Kay Mulvaney  
Reporter



Photo by Sam B. Myers

Texas A&M researchers are studying the effects that seasonal changes and other factors have on one of nature's most enduring creatures — the roach.

John Paige, who is working on his doctorate in urban entomology at Texas A&M, is doing research on German cockroaches to determine how seasonal changes affect the behavior and population dynamics of domesticated roaches.

"We pretty much know that there aren't as many roaches in the winter because you just don't see them," Paige said. "We are studying the intricacies of the population. Does it affect the age and sex? Is it the adults running around in the winter or the nymphs (young roaches)?"

Harry Howell, a research associate in urban entomology, explained that there are 3,000 species of roaches in the world and 40 species in Texas. Of the 3,000 species, only six live in households, which leaves a large percentage of roaches that live in the wild.

The two most common species of roaches that live in homes are the German cockroach and the brown-banded cockroach.

Paige recently assisted five students with a speech communications project to help the community become aware of steps it could take to prevent roach infestation in homes or places of business.

It helps to not keep paper sacks or cardboard boxes that are not needed around the house or place of business because that is where these roaches tend to lay eggs, he said. Although this hasn't been backed up by research, it just makes common sense, he said.

He also suggested storing breakfast cereals in plastic or glass containers instead of leaving them in the cardboard boxes that they come in.

As part of their research, the five students went with Paige to the entomology lab to observe these pests that infest the Bryan-College Station area. German cockroaches are their main area of interest, but they also saw roaches from Madagascar, Africa.

The Madagascar roaches range

These Madagascar cockroaches hiss in order to fend off predators and to attract mates.

from two to three inches long, are black and tan, have hard, ribbed backs — and hiss.

Although it is possible that some of the roaches have escaped from the lab, it is unlikely that too many of them could survive, Howell said.

"Anything possibly could escape, but they wouldn't be able to live in this climate," Howell said. "They wouldn't be able to survive one mild winter here."

"I'm sure we've had many escap- es."

He said it is important to know which roaches live in the homes and which ones live in the wild when trying to control them.

"If a German roach appears in your house, you know they're here to stay," he said. "But if a large, hissing, Madagascar roach appears you know that it is probably the only one that is in your house."

Roaches are not as bad as they seem, Howell said, explaining that they are important in recycling nutrients.

Roaches are constantly cleaning themselves, he said. After a period in isolation, it is hard to scrape any bacteria off the pests, he added.

"If they come walking across your Thanksgiving table then they're bad, but out in the wilderness they're good," he said.

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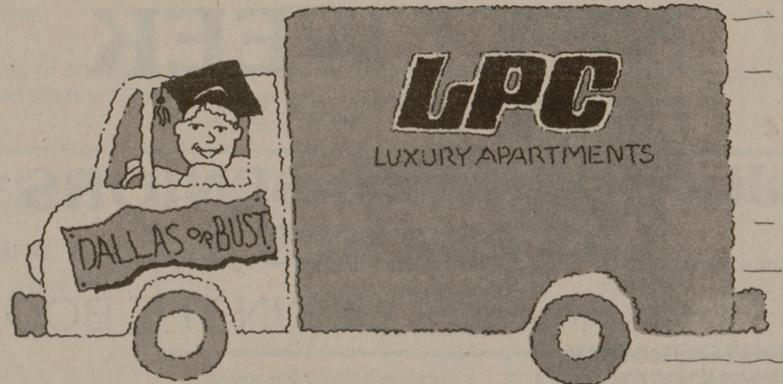
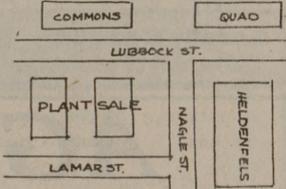
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