

## **The Syracuse (NY) Post-Standard via World Wide Web**

### **Watch Out For Tree Killer**

#### **Effort to squash deadly bug spreads to Syracuse area**

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**By Marnie Eisenstadt - Staff writer**

If Asian longhorned beetles could, they would be slipping on little ski masks right now, or turning their white spots to red to throw scientists off their trail.

Efforts to vanquish this bug received \$28 million in the federal spending bill passed by Congress last week.

And close to 200,000 bookmarks are circulating in New York with the offending bug's picture and a hotline people can call if they've seen it. Of those markers, 15,000 are sticking out of books and on library counters in the Syracuse area.

"This is a very dangerous alien immigrant," said E. Richard Hoebeke, a beetle expert who is the assistant curator of Cornell University's insect collection. "They kill what look to you and I as vigorous, healthy trees."

The beetles chomp through the trees, leaving swiss-cheese trunks in their wake. They have the potential to devastate entire forests, which is why officials want to be notified right away when the bugs are spotted.

Hoebeke examined and identified the first Asian longhorned beetle found in the United States in 1996; that beetle was discovered in Brooklyn. Scientists think it and others got into the country by hiding out in wooden shipping crates carrying goods from China to New York City and other port cities.

There are other, similar beetles in the country. But what makes this insect different is that it attacks healthy trees. The others feast on the dead and dying.

Since the first Asian longhorned beetle was discovered, the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has launched a full-scale attack.

In New York City, an area of 132 square miles is under quarantine.

Trees and certain kinds of lumber, including firewood, cannot be moved out of that area. And scientists are continually monitoring trees there, trying to control the beetles' spread.

In New York City, more than 7,000 trees have been cut down and chipped up to kill the beetles, said John Dodd, a spokesman for the USDA's Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication Program. More trees have been removed in New Jersey and Illinois, where the beetles have also taken up residence in hardwood trees.

Those trees have been replaced with other types of trees that the beetles don't find as tasty, Dodd said.

Currently, there is no information that the beetles have spread out of their quarantined areas, but it is quite difficult to know where they are unless people are looking for them, Hoebeke said.

"It's like looking for a needle in a haystack," he said.

And that needle is so potentially devastating that the scientists at the [University of Vermont], a state with no known Asian longhorned beetles, jumped onboard as soon as they heard about the infestation in New York.

"When the first insect was found, we got involved," said Margaret Skinner, a professor of entomology. That's because one in every three trees in Vermont is some type of maple, which is the Asian longhorned beetle's favorite.

The bookmarks now circulating came out of [UVM], and the school also has a Web site that tells people how to spot an Asian longhorned beetle. The USDA funds the bookmark program.

Skinner said that all of the Asian longhorned beetle infestations in the country have been found by average citizens on the lookout for the strange looking critter. The beetle's distinctive white spots and unusually long antennae have worked against it, making it easy for the public to identify.

"The Asian longhorned beetle, you see that and by golly people stand up and take notice," Skinner said. "It's just an excellent candidate for public awareness."

The USDA has been working to stop the Asian longhorned beetle's path of destruction, but another infestation could be an accidental hitchhike away.

Dodd, of the USDA, said the biggest danger to Central New York trees is firewood people bring with them to their camps from their Downstate homes. The beetle could easily hop a ride on a pile of firewood destined from the quarantined area to a camp in Central New York. Even though people aren't supposed to move firewood out of the restricted area, some still don't know about the rules. The beetle can also fly up to a half-mile at a time.

If the Asian longhorned beetle moves to other areas of the state, the trees it decides to make its home in face the same destiny found by those in New York City - they will be chopped, then chipped. That's why it's so important to spot an infestation early.

"The beetle poses a very serious and ominous threat if it escapes," said Hoebeke, of Cornell.

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