



Information

Bohart Museum of Entomology

No. 009

Box Elder Bugs

One of the more brightly colored insects in California is the Western Box Elder Bug, *Boisea rubrolineata*. Adult Box Elder Bugs are about 3/4 inch long, grayish brown with thin red stripes on the pronotum (thorax) and wings. The base of the legs, as well as the bottom and top of the abdomen, are bright red. Immature bugs are entirely bright red in color, and do not have wings.

The bugs over-winter as adults in sheltered spots around the base of trees and in and around buildings or other structures. In the spring, the adults emerge and lay minute red eggs in cracks and crevices in the bark of Box Elder trees. Eggs usually hatch in about 2 weeks. The nymphs feed by inserting their beaks into leaves, fruits or soft seeds and sucking the plant juices. Feeding continues throughout the summer and the nymphs gradually mature, becoming adults as cold weather approaches in the fall.

Box Elder Bugs occur throughout North America. In areas with cold climates these bugs will appear in swarms or clusters in sunny locations on buildings or tree trunks in the fall and spring. The aggregations can be spectacular when large numbers of individuals are involved, but also are considered an annoyance depending on where the aggregation occurs.

Adults and young bugs feed on the foliage of Box Elder trees and maples. Less commonly they also will feed on young developing fruit of apples, cherries, grapes, peaches and plums.

Their bite punctures cause dimpling and scarring of the fruit. For the most part, however, they are not considered agricultural pests, but are more of a nuisance in some parts of the country.

