

Cryptic Egg Masses of Invasive Species

Invasive insects are a serious threat to the biodiversity and function of native ecosystems. Oftentimes, and unknowingly, people are the ones transporting these organisms to new, uninfested areas. One reason these insects are on KDA's Watch List is because they are exceptional hitchhikers. They won't be standing on the side of the road with a tarsi-up, however; their method of hitchhiking is much more discreet.

Hitchhiking can occur at any life stage, even before the insects hatch. To hitchhike, the insect must simply attach itself to an object that can be transported elsewhere—including vehicles, trailers, boxcars, firewood, and other outdoor equipment.

In particular, the eggs of some invasive species are fairly cryptic; they are not particularly noticeable and may resemble other objects. Moreover, these egg masses can be laid on nearly any surface, thus making this life stage a fantastic hitchhiker.

This report will go in-depth on the cryptic egg masses of two invasive insects: spongy moth and spotted lanternfly (SLF).

Overview: Spongy Moth Egg Masses

The egg masses of spongy moths appear as tan-brown, fuzzy lumps about the size of a quarter. There are approximately 100–600 eggs housed in a single mass. Newly laid egg masses may appear darker and firm to the touch while older masses are reportedly lighter in color and softer or spongier, hence the name.

Around July or August, female moths begin laying the eggs of the next generation. These eggs will overwinter—remaining dormant for about 8-9

months—before hatching in April or May the following year. If eggs are laid on moveable objects, this lengthy period of dormancy gives the eggs plenty of time to hitchhike to an uninfested area.



Spongy moth egg masses up close (left) versus egg masses seen from a distance (right).

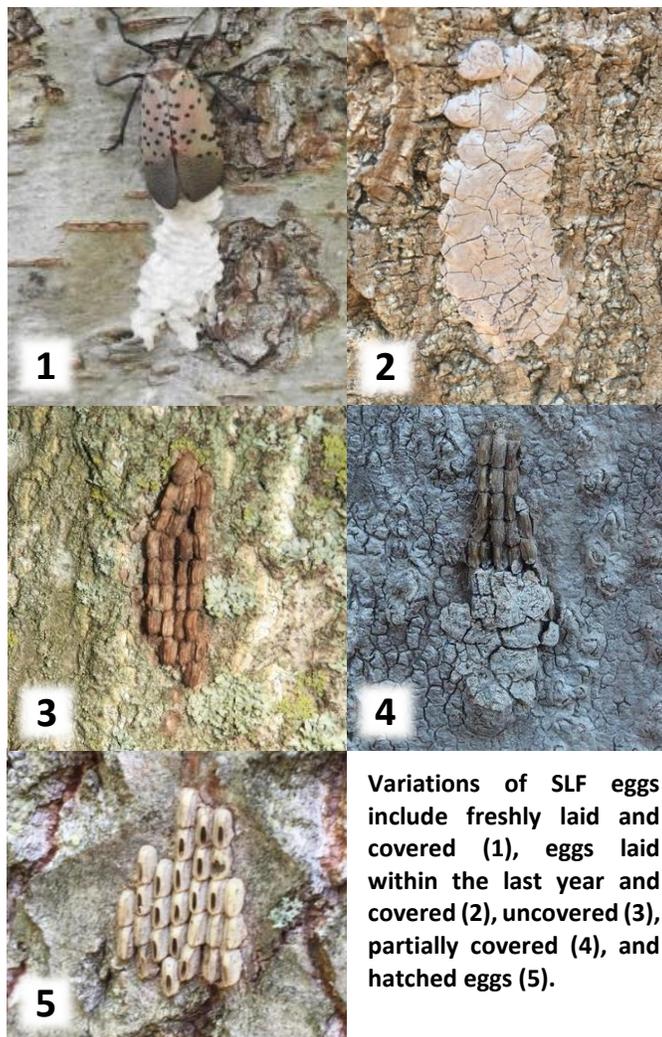


Female moths laying eggs on the wheel of a vehicle—a prime hitchhiking opportunity!

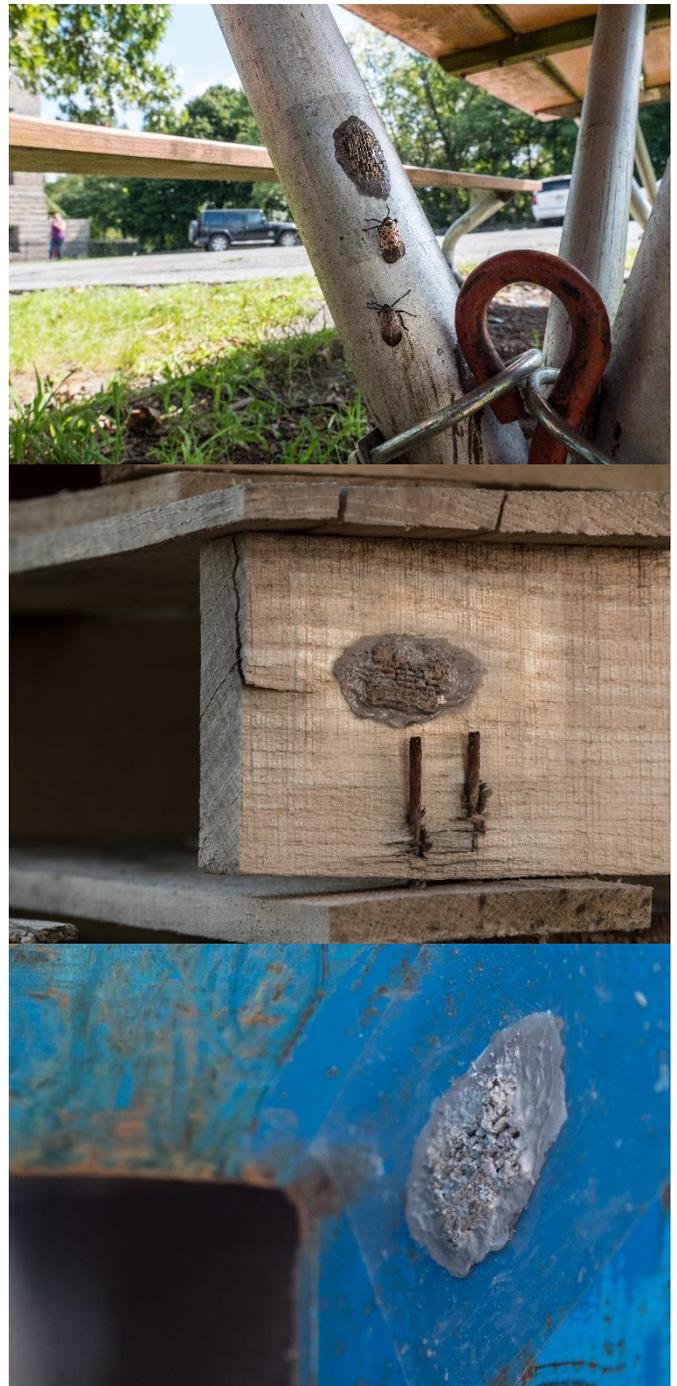
Overview: Spotted Lanternfly Egg Masses

Like spongy moths, spotted lanternflies lay their eggs in masses that remain dormant through the winter until the nymphs emerge in the spring. These brown-grey egg masses are eloquently described as “smears of dried mud.” Female SLF lay rows of small, seed-like eggs and then cover them with a substance that presumably protects the eggs as they overwinter.

For identification purposes, it is important to note that there can be some variation in SLF egg mass appearance. Newly laid masses are white before fading into their signature mud-like color. Sometimes, the eggs are only partially covered with the substance, or not covered at all. The presence of emergence holes on uncovered eggs indicates an older mass where nymphs have already hatched.



Variations of SLF eggs include freshly laid and covered (1), eggs laid within the last year and covered (2), uncovered (3), partially covered (4), and hatched eggs (5).



SLF egg masses laid on various surfaces: a picnic table (top), wooden pallet (middle), and metal dumpster (bottom). Photos courtesy of the USDA-APHIS Flickr library.

As the weather warms up and more time is spent outside, be on the lookout for cryptic egg masses and report any sightings to KDA. While spongy moth and spotted lanternfly are not established in Kansas, a single hitchhiking event can introduce these invasive insects into the state.

References

1. Eshenaur, B. New York State Integrated Pest Management: Spongy Moth. Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Accessed 4 April 2024.
2. Krawczyk, G., Leach, H., Briggs, L., and Calvin, D. 2023. What should you do with spotted lanternfly egg masses? PennState Extension. Accessed 8 April 2024.
3. McNee, B. 2023. DNR encourages property owners to make spongy moth treatment plans early. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Accessed 5 April 2024.
4. Sequeira, C. and Bond, S. 2024. USDA asks residents to look for invasive egg masses. United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Accessed 10 April 2024.



Locally...

Franklin County. The weather is warming up... that means the insects are coming out! One of the first insects spotted this year is pictured on the left—ants! This ant in particular is called an **acrobat ant** (genus *Crematogaster*). These ants are easily identified by their heart-shaped abdomen. When disturbed, they raise their abdomen over their head in quite the acrobatic fashion. Acrobat ants are common and can be found around moist, decaying wood.

For more information on pests, surveys, and current quarantine regulations, please visit agriculture.ks.gov/insects

BUY IT WHERE YOU BURN IT.

Stop the spread of tree-killing insects.

[Learn more](#)



DONTMOVE FIREWOOD.org

Author
Rachel Wilkins
 State Entomologist
 2004 Research Park Cir
 Manhattan, KS 66506
 (785) 370-2095

