**Thoughts on the Spotted Lanternfly in Berks County, PA**

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From the beginning of this summer to the present I have been looking for the Spotted Lanternfly in northwestern Berks County, PA while doing other research. My wife and I over the summer have seen nymphs at three places: the start of the Fox Trot trail in Blue Marsh, Bernville Sewer plant and the old elementary school in Shartlesville. The latter having at least a dozen nymphs. I also saw an adult in August at the Wyomissing Family Restaurant after having lunch with a friend.

I walked with the specific purpose of looking for the SLF on September 4 and 5 in SGL110 near Shartlesville with negative results, on September 6, along a 1.5 mile stretch of the loop trail in Blue Marsh on either side of mile 19 with negative results and on September 8, Blue Marsh at mile 1, (“dog beach”/emergency flood overflow area), finding an infestation. All these locations are within a few miles of my home and contain ample *Ailanthus* trees.

What I have learned by direct observation and from talking with other people is that the SLF is spreading mostly in suburban and urban areas. This is due to several conditions;

1. Vehicles to transport the SLF over the landscape
2. Places people congregate for at least an hour at a time
3. *Ailanthus* trees

Since the SLF is a hopper, to travel across the landscape the way it is requires vehicles to hitchhike on. Apparently, it uses flat smooth surfaces such as cars, trucks, boats and boat trailers. I first saw the SLF at First Energy Stadium in Reading last fall. People from all over the county, including Boyertown/Oley – the area of introduction, and surrounding areas congregate here for baseball games and other events. This brought the SLF from infested areas to a common meeting place from which it can change vehicles to travel to other areas. From what I heard it is in similar urban and suburban places that people congregate from across the county such as restaurants, a campground near Shartlesville and the old elementary school in Shartlesville (which is now a conservative Anabaptist church). Additionally, I heard that at the stilling basin in Blue Marsh the *Ailanthus* trees had SLF egg masses last fall, which is the reason we walked from there on September 8. This last mentioned location is a place people congregate from across the county to fish as it is one of the few county lakes with public access.

*Ailanthus* trees are ubiquitous in Berks County. So, there is always an available food supply. The two contiguous parts of SGL110 which I walked for several miles are remote dirt roads which are open only during hunting season starting in mid-September. No SLF was found there. The 1-1/2 miles of Blue Marsh I walked was parallel to a major artery, Rt. 183. Even though it is a major road, few people stop along it, including in the minor towns, because it is mostly a commuter route from Schuylkill County to Reading in Berks County and between Rt. 222 and I-78.

Contrasting the SLF with the Brown Marmorated Stinkbug is the difference between a flyer which occasionally hitchhikes and a hopper which must hitchhike to spread. Both were first found within 30 miles of my home. Where I live we have had hundreds, if not thousands of BMSB. (They have forced me to rethink how I garden and what vegetables to grow. This means that there will be early producing beans such as bush varieties instead of later pole varieties and non-red cherry tomatoes as red cherry tomatoes appear to be a preferred food more than other tomato types.) Another difference between the two insects is that the BMSB is supposed to have 2 or 3 generations per year as opposed to just one generation per year for the SLF.

BMSB easily spreads across the landscape on its own. SLF does not. A further note is that in our vegetable garden we are seeing much smaller stages of the BMSB predominating at the present than in past years. This may be possibly due to the amount of rain and overcast days we have had this summer.

Japanese stilt grass and mile-a-minute are plant contrasts similar to the SLF and BMSB. To spread across the landscape under normal conditions Japanese stilt grass moves on either shoes or occasionally vehicles and down vernal waterflows. I see it along the trails and dirt roads in SGL110. Most of these distances are relatively short. In contrast as is evident in SGL110 in Tilden Township, mile-a-minute is spread by birds along the ridge and a dirt road near the top of the ridge. The berries are consumed by birds and obviously left behind at roosts when the birds take flight. The fall migration route along the ridge and roosts the birds use are obvious by the density of mile-a-minute.

The “quarantine” of the SLF was nothing but a pathetic Trump-like joke. Like the wavy leaf basket grass, once the SLF was established there was nothing which could be done about it. Convincing people that they could make a difference with NRA-like fear propaganda erodes our position as scientists in our society and increases the distrust scientists like me have of our scientific and political leadership. The only people who will benefit are investors in pesticide companies like Monsanto. Right now, the only reasonable course of action besides intelligently educating people about this issue is to take the time to do science; patiently study the SLF over at least several years with the forlorn hope of preventing similar issues in the future.

