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Sweet-potato bugs infesting sea morning glory at Kent Ridge

Subjects: Sweet-potato bug, *Physomerus grossipes* (Insecta: Hemiptera: Coreidae);
Sea morning glory, *Ipomoea pes-caparae* (Magnoliophyta: Solanales: Convolvulaceae).

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Kent Ridge, Conservatory Drive, premises of Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum; 11 February 2016; around 1500 hrs.

Habitat: Urban. Concrete planter on a building.

Observers: Contributors.

Observation: At least 30 adult sweet-potato bugs were observed on the leaves and stems of sea morning glory plants grown within an elevated outdoor planter. Some were found singly, while others were in mating pairs (Fig. 1). Up to 10 individuals were noted on a single branch. Clusters of eggs were observed on leaves of the sea morning glory, and an adjacent plant, *Memecylon caeruleum* (Fig. 2). Eggs were also laid on metal railing (Fig. 3). A batch of recently emerged nymphs was also observed on one of the metal railings (Figs. 4-5). All clusters of eggs and recently hatched nymphs were attended by an adult bug.

Remarks: The sweet-potato bug is a plant sap sucker that mainly attacks soft stemmed plants, in particular *Ipomoea* species. The female practices maternal egg and brood care. Individual females have been documented guarding mixed-age nymph groups, and multiple females are known to guard a group of nymphs of the same age (Costa, 2006; Ronato & Esguerra, 1990). This species is sexually dimorphic. The males have enlarged hind tibia and a large spine on their hind legs (Ronato & Esguerra, 1990).


Fig. 1. Ventral view of a pair of mating bugs.

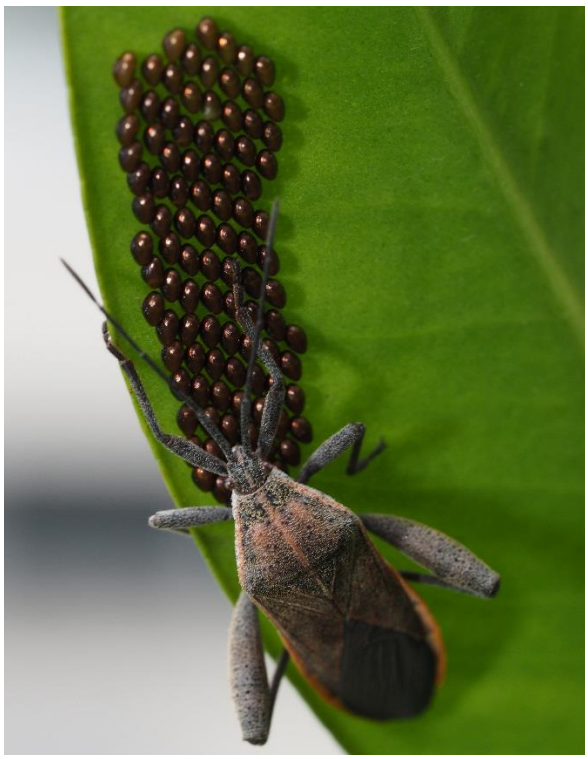


Fig. 2. Female guarding a cluster of eggs.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui

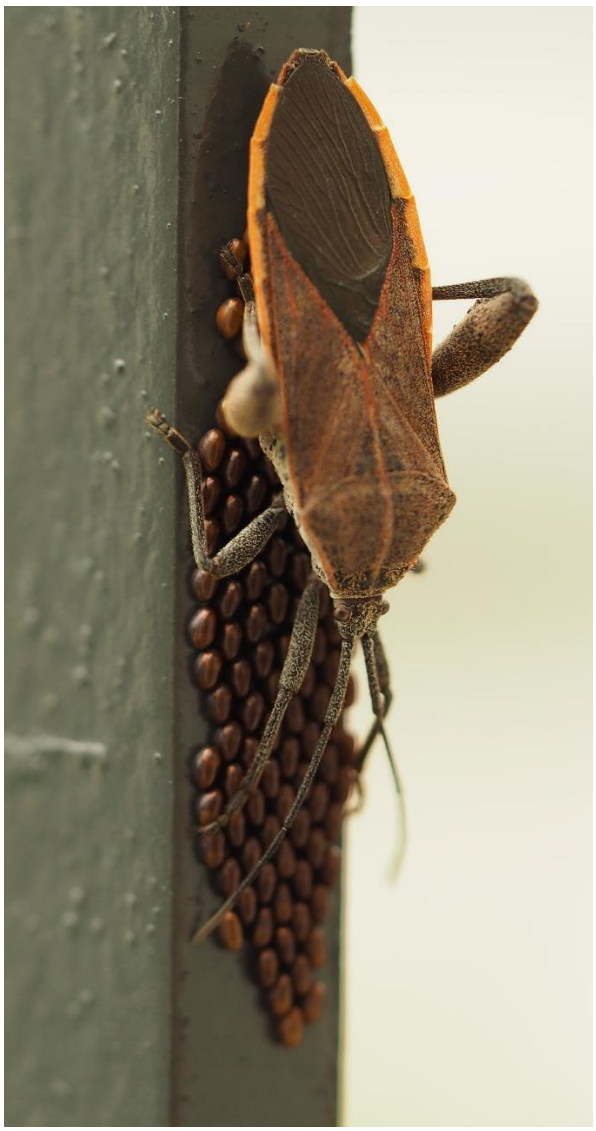


Fig. 3. Female over eggs laid on a metal railing.

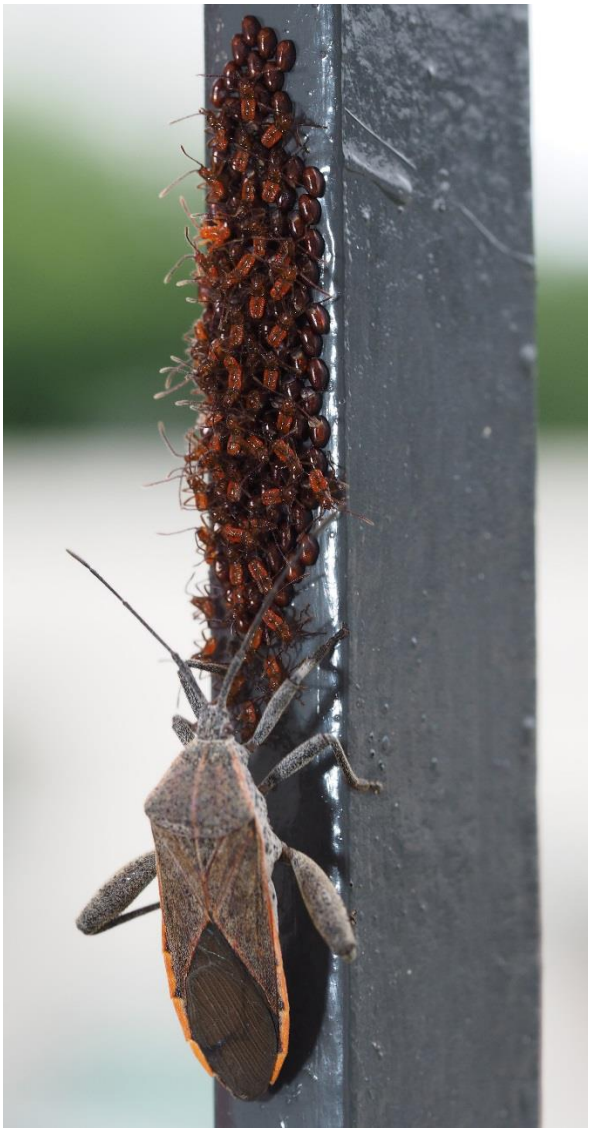


Fig. 4. Female with nymphs on a metal railing.

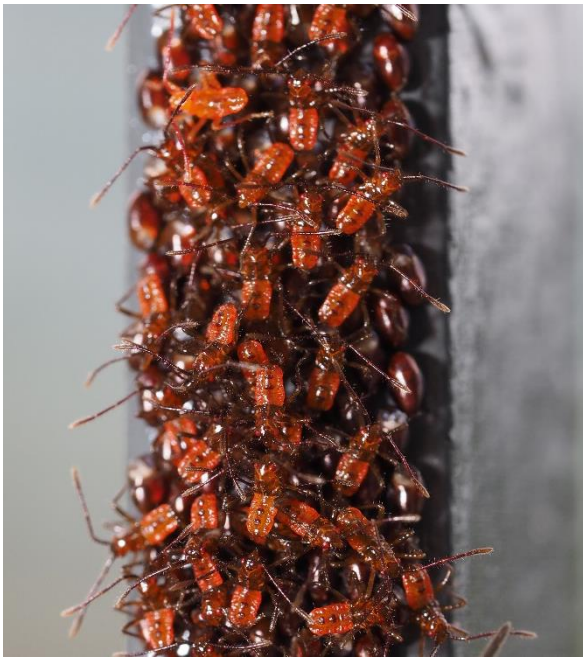
References:

Costa, J. T., 2006. *The Other Insect Societies*. Belknap Press series. Harvard University Press. 812 pp.

Ronato, S. F. & N. M. Esguerra, 1990. Biology of sweetpotato bug, *Physomerus grossipes* Fabr. (Coreidae, Hemiptera). *Annals of Tropical Research*. 12 (1-4): 1-9.

Contributors: **Tan** Heok Hui & Jeremy W. L. **Yeo**

Contact addresses: nhmthh@nus.edu.sg (Tan), Jeremy.yeo@nus.edu.sg (Yeo)



Photographs by Tan Heok Hui

Fig. 5. Close-up of nymphs on a metal railing.