

WATCH OUT WHITE GRUBS - HERE COME THE SCOLIID WASPS!

By Ralph E. Mitchell

Many people in our area have reported seeing large gatherings of generally black and yellow or white striped wasps congregating on plants and hovering over lawns - I have seen them myself. The appearance of such wasps can be very upsetting to homeowners as they associate these insects with stings and pain. However, appearances can be deceiving! These insects are called scoliid wasps. As threatening as they may appear, scoliid wasps are beneficial, and for the most part, harmless.

What is going on when we see swarms of scoliid wasps hovering over a lawn area? These female wasps, sometimes hard to see; skim over the surface of lawns in figure-eight patterns. They are in search of a certain insect - the white grub. Once a female detects a white grub in the soil, she digs down and stings it. The sting(s) cause the grub to become paralyzed. She then lays an egg on the paralyzed grub. The wasp egg eventually hatches and begins to feed on the live, but paralyzed grub - not a pleasant way to go if you think about it! The larval scoliid wasp is a parasite that feeds on their live grub host for about two weeks before it spins a cocoon and rests. This is the beneficial aspect of the scoliid wasp - a natural biological control for white grubs (the larvae of certain beetles such as May/June beetles, Green June Beetles, etc.) which would normally feed on the roots of grass causing, in some cases, significant damage to lawns. In addition to the

actual consumption of white grubs by the wasp larvae, many other white grubs are stung by the female wasps that are not parasitized, but never recover from the sting.

Now, if you were to grab a female scoliid wasp in your hand, she would likely give you a painful sting in defense. However, as these are solitary wasps and not social nest builders as are yellow jackets, you will seldom if ever run into an aggressive situation with them. Male scoliid wasps, somewhat smaller and thinner than females, have no stingers and are truly harmless. Great numbers of male scoliid wasps may gather for a time in swarms. Adult scoliid wasps feed on nectar and possibly pollen.



Adult Scolia nobilitata Fabricius, a scoliid wasp.
Photograph by Lyle J. Buss, University of Florida

If you see these wasps buzzing your lawn, not to worry, they are doing an unseen job for you underground. Soon the wasps will disappear, as the next generation over winters in the soil. While not a complete control for white grubs, scoliid wasps do some good. Good ridded to white grubs thanks to this natural control! For more information on all types of beneficial insects and organisms, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** every Thursday 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) every Thursday 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** 1st Saturday of month.
- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Grissell, E. E. (2007) Scoliid Wasps of Florida. Featured Creatures. The University of Florida, IFAS.

Scoliid Wasps. (2007) http://ipm.ncsu.edu/AG268/html/scoliid_wasps.htm.

Hymenoptera, Scollidae. (2007) <http://faculty.ucr.edu/~legnerref/taxonomy/scoliid.htm>.

Buss, E. A. (2006) White Grub Biology and Management. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.