

# Insec(tc)ure\*:

## Are you insecure about your insect cures?

A University of Tennessee Urban IPM Lab Newsletter for the Pest Management Industry

### Are these white shavings caused by carpenter ants?

*Karen Vail, UT Entomology & Plant Pathology*



*Figure 1. The glue board is covered with what appears to be white foamboard insulation or Styrofoam shavings, along with some smaller, dark objects. Credit: K. Vail, UT E&PP*

On September 4, this glue board (Figure 1) was submitted to UT Extension's Soil, Plant and Pest Center. The submitter believed the glue board exhibited evidence of carpenter ant damage and sought confirmation or correct identification so they could plan accordingly. At first glance, without magnification, the white material resembled foamboard insulation shavings that may have fallen onto the glue board after being kicked out of an ant nest. The shavings did appear smaller than what I typically see with carpenter ants, but I wasn't ready to exclude them from the possibilities.

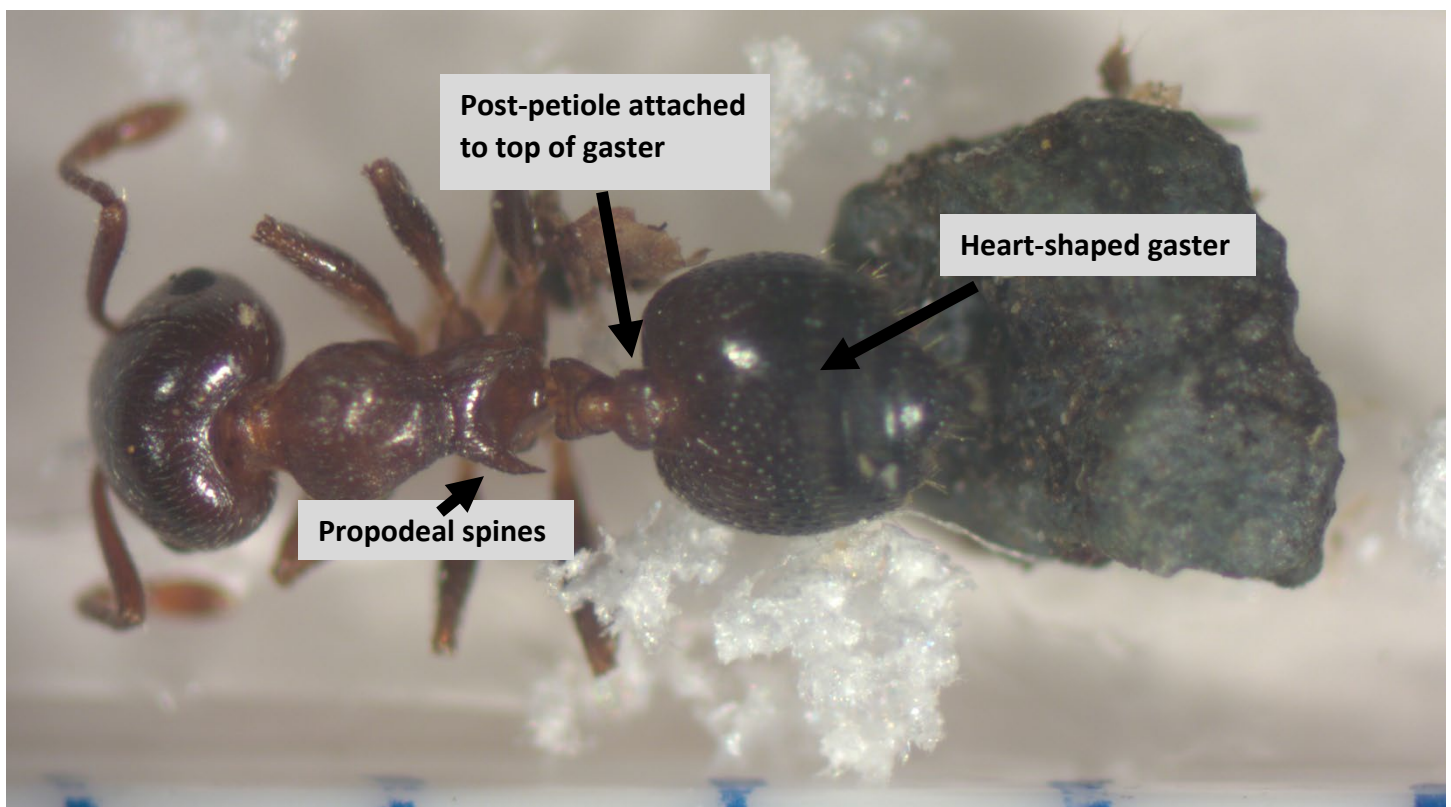


Figure 2. Closer inspection of the dark specks on the glue board revealed an acrobat ant, *Crematogaster* sp. The blue lines are 1 mm apart. Credit: K. Vail, UT E&PP

However, upon closer examination at higher magnification, the black specks were identified as acrobat ants, *Crematogaster* sp. (Figure 2). Note the two-segmented flattened petiole in which the post-petiole attaches to the top of the gaster - a key identification feature of this genus. The post-petiole attachment to the top of the gaster allows the ant to flip the gaster above its head when alarmed, thus resembling an acrobat and providing the reasoning for its common name. Also note the long propodeal spines and the nearly heart-shaped gaster.

Both carpenter ants and acrobat ants will remove wood or other substrates to make galleries for their immatures. Outdoors, their nests can be found in decaying stumps, logs, tree cavities, or in limbs, as well as in leaf litter or soil under rocks or limbs. Indoor nests are often associated with moisture-damaged wood such as that around windows or doors, or near leaks, including skylights. They'll even excavate Styrofoam® or foamboard insulation or use wood previously damaged by carpenter ants or termites. Remember, ants are not eating the wood as a nutrient source; they are removing parts to create nest galleries that hold their immatures. The frass/shavings accumulate under the nest. These ants are omnivores that feed on the sugary excrement from sucking insects (aphids, mealybugs, etc.), nectar, and insects, among other things. Indoors, they may feed on sweets and meats. When they are done feeding on insect prey, the remaining exoskeletons are expelled from the nest opening and can be found in the shavings piled below. Carpenter bee frass will also accumulate under the nest openings. Thus, if insects are found in the wood shavings on an outside windowsill, we know the culprit is not a carpenter bee because the female reproductive is collecting pollen and nectar to make bee bread for her immatures to feed on and is not preying on insects. But we still don't know which ant is responsible. That's why it's essential to comb through the shavings to find the ant cadavers. Ants will remove dead colony members to prevent contagion from spreading through the colony. This behavior provides the clues we need to determine which ant is causing the damage.

Once the ant is identified as an acrobat ant, a thorough inspection is the next step in managing this pest. Look for the ants and conducive conditions both indoors and out. In addition to the nest sites mentioned already, don't forget to examine the firewood piles, gutters, puckering paint, and other signs of moisture on the home's exterior and interior. A moisture meter can help locate moisture problems inside and outside the house. Ensure wire and pipe penetrations and any cracks in the foundation wall are sealed well to prevent ant movement indoors. Trim back branches so they no

longer touch the structure, thus removing any bridges to the structure. Remove limbs on the ground. Leaks should be repaired, and any moisture-damaged wood should be replaced.

If ant colonies are exposed during the inspection process, they can be directly removed with a vacuum or treated with an appropriately labeled insecticide. Never apply a liquid insecticide to electrical components. It's difficult for liquids to penetrate foam. In this case, an insecticidal dust or foam may be more effective in penetrating the galleries, or ant bait may be applied near ant activity to allow the toxicant to be transferred to the colony nesting in the foam. Ants nesting in wall voids can be baited, or the void can be drilled and dusted.

The acrobat ants submitted to me were eventually found at the roof/soffit line of the garage building and around the property in the trees in the front yard. The siding was drilled, and a slow-acting product was foamed into the holes and used as a perimeter treatment. In addition, granular baits were applied near the activity in the trees. Currently, we are awaiting the results of this treatment.

Acrobat ants are commonly encountered in Tennessee. In a Knoxville odorous house ant study conducted this summer, acrobat ants were found around the perimeter of at least one-third of the houses at least once during the 6-week study. However, acrobat ant colonies are small compared to those of odorous house ants, and most of the damage to wood occurs in wood that was already damaged by another insect or moisture. Thus, acrobat ants are not considered a serious wood-destroying organism, but are still considered a pest and should be managed.

#### Reference

Hedges, S. 2010. Field Guide for the Management of Structure-infesting Ants. 3rd edition. GIE Media, Richfield, OH.

## Upcoming Category 7 Training Opportunities

Associate Certified Entomologist (ACE) Exam Prep Course, Sept. 15 – Dec. 15, virtual,  
<https://tiny.utk.edu/ACEPrepFall2025>

WDO/GRC Licensing Training, October 9, Murfreesboro, TN, <https://psep.tennessee.edu/>

The National Pest Management Association's PestWorld, October 21-24, Orlando, FL  
<https://www.npmapestworld.org/attend/industry-events-calendar/pestworld-2025/>

TPCA's PestEd: Monthly Virtual CEUs, *TBD*, by Dr. Santos Portugal, Mississippi State University, October 29.  
<https://tpca.info/> (Other monthly webinars will be the last Wednesday of the month, so mark your calendars. There may be date adjustments around the holidays.)

Pesticide Applicator Category 7 and Category 3 Trainings, <https://psep.tennessee.edu/commercial-applicator/>

East Tennessee Pest Control Association's Smoky Mountain Conference, January 24, 2026, UT Conference Center, Knoxville, TN <https://www.etpca.org/Smoky-Mountain-Conference>

12<sup>th</sup> Annual Tennessee Bed Bug, Cockroach and Rodent Management Meeting, August 5, 2026, UT Conference Center, Knoxville, TN



## JoroWatch Launches 4th Annual Joro Spider Spotting & Photo Contest:

Debby Monfort, UGA Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health

**October 6–12, 2025**

Tifton, GA — Where are Joro Spiders this season? Is their range spreading? The public is invited to help find out by joining the **4th Annual Joro Spider Spotting & Photo Contest**, running **October 6–12, 2025**.

Participants can enter by submitting spider sightings at [jorowatch.org](https://jorowatch.org), [eddmaps.org](https://eddmaps.org), or through the free [EDDMapS app](#). Each report should include clear, well-focused photos—up to four images per report and no limit on the number of reports submitted. Reports verified by expert identifiers will be eligible for awards.

### Contest Awards Include:

- **County Champ** – First verified report in a county
- **Super Spotter** – Most verified reports overall
- **County Hopper** – Reports from the most counties
- **Golden, Silver & Bronze Lens** – Top three photos judged on clarity, composition, scientific value, and creativity
- **Spotlight Mentions** – Honorable mentions for outstanding images

Winning participants receive exclusive contest stickers, recognition on [JoroWatch.org](https://JoroWatch.org) and social media, and the opportunity to contribute their photos to the **Bugwood Image Database**, where images are used worldwide for education and research.

Now in its fourth year, the contest highlights citizen science (and photo-taking talent) and the role it plays in monitoring, in this instance, the spread of the non-native Joro spider (*Trichonephila clavata*). Since its first detection in Georgia in 2014, the Joro spider has rapidly expanded its range, and public reporting through EDDMapS helps scientists better understand its distribution and impacts.

“Every report makes a difference,” said Rebekah Wallace, EDDMapS Data Coordinator at the University of Georgia Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health. “By combining community participation with expert verification, we’re building a clearer picture of how Joro spiders are moving across the landscape.”

For contest details and reporting instructions, visit [www.jorowatch.org](https://www.jorowatch.org).



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Insec(tc)ure is edited by Jennifer Chandler and Pat Parkman and archived online at  
<https://epp.tennessee.edu/urban-ipm-newsletters/>

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### **Precautionary Statement**

To protect people and the environment, pesticides should be used safely. This is everyone's responsibility, especially the user. Read and follow label directions carefully before you buy, mix, apply, store or dispose of a pesticide. According to laws regulating pesticides, they must be used only as directed by the label and registered for use in your state.

### **Disclaimer**

This publication contains pesticide recommendations that are subject to change at any time. The recommendations in this publication are provided only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. The label always takes precedence over the recommendations found in this publication.

Use of trade or brand names in this publication is for clarity and information; it does not imply approval of the product to the exclusion of others that may be of similar, suitable composition, nor does it guarantee or warrant the standard of the product. The author(s), the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture and University of Tennessee Extension assume no liability resulting from the use of these recommendations.

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