

Los Angeles Unified School District Pest of the Month Program No. 20.

RECOGNIZING ANIMAL DROPPINGS FOUND WITHIN STRUCTURES.

Introduction.

Occasionally, animal droppings are found within school district buildings. For the most part, these animal droppings (scientifically called scats which is an abbreviation taken from the biological term scatology which is the study of fecal excrement) are left behind by commensal rodents which enter and sometimes live in structures. The word 'commensal' when used with reference to rodents means "to share the table". In a more general sense, commensal rodents are those which live with or near humans and may depend on them for all or part of their food, water, and harborages. In a strict sense of the word, commensal rodents are generally the Norway rat, roof rat, and house mouse. From time to time, other rodent species may invade structures to seek food, warmth, water, nesting sites, harborage, etc. However, these rodents do not remain within buildings for protracted periods of time and do not reproduce there. Commensal rodents are secretive, cryptic, and nocturnal animals and their presence are often determined by the scats they leave behind. It is important that rodent droppings are correctly identified because control tactics vary from species to species. For example, if you mistakenly sent out rat traps when the infestation is really mice, you will find your traps set off with nothing caught in them.

Commensal rodent scats.

The purpose of this pest of the month program is to provide plant managers and other site administrators with a simple pictorial key to animal droppings which are sometimes found within LAUSD structures.

Please see the attached picture. The scats are arranged in descending order of size from left to right. On the left are Norway rat scats. These are the largest scats of the commensal rodents. They are about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long and blunt at both ends. The next set of scats belongs to the roof rat. They are about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long, narrower than the Norway rat scats, and often pointed at one or both ends. The third set of scats in descending order of size is that of the house mouse. They are about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long, somewhat barrel shaped, and often pointed at both ends. The last set of fecal pellets on the extreme right is that of the American cockroach. They are about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch long, generally rectangular in shape, and have ridges on them. The ridges are best observed with 10X magnification. Please be reminded that the color of rodent droppings varies tremendously depending on what the animals are eating. Some time ago the manufacturer of a rodent bait produced and sold a green bait. Rodents that fed on this green bait defecated green scats. Some pest

management technicians, who saw the green scats, were somewhat bewildered by them because they had never seen green commensal rodent droppings before.

American cockroach droppings.

American cockroach droppings are sometimes found in LAUSD buildings. Almost all of the time, these droppings are misidentified by school site personnel and they are called in as mice droppings. Please refer to the attached picture. It is understandable that non-pest management personnel can misidentify these fecal droppings. When American cockroach feces are consistently called in as mice droppings, it artificially inflates the number of mice work orders and it make it appear to the uniformed lay person that the District has a lot of mice infestations when that is not really the case. It is not my intention to make you a Scatologist, but I am respectfully requesting that you make an honest effort to check out fecal matter that are brought to your attention and try to see if you can make the right call. If you are not sure what you have, perhaps you can call it in as fecal matter and let the pest management technician make the correct determination when he/she visits the site.

Please be advised that there are many other common pests which leave fecal matter in and around structures. Examples of some of these pests are drywood termites, crickets, earwigs, Oriental cockroach, Turkestan cockroach, lizards, etc.

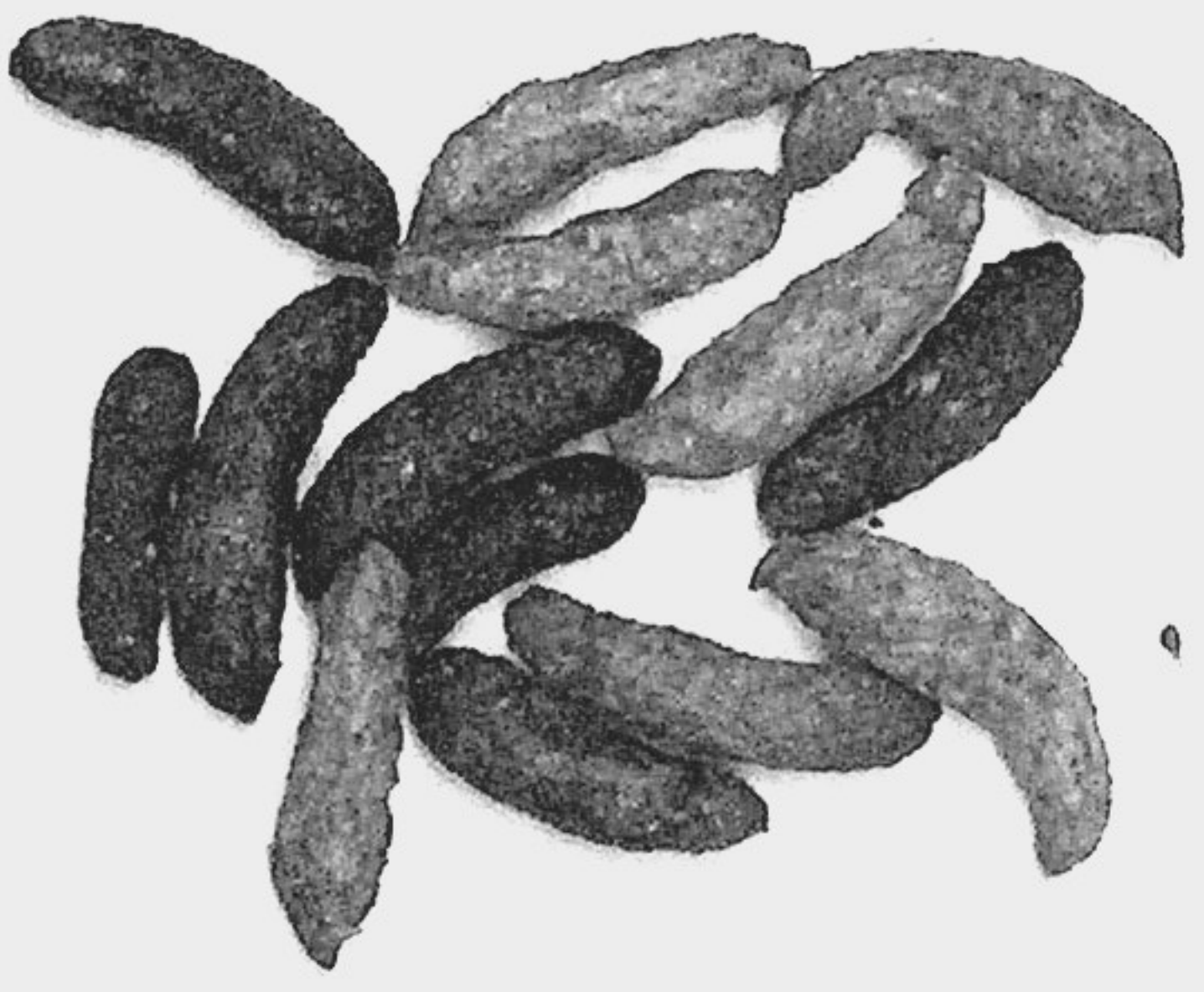
What happens when mistakes are made.

Please refer to the second picture which is attached. Mouse snap traps were set out to control what was thought to be a mice infestation. These traps were being set off with nothing caught on them. The person who misdiagnosed the problem eventually caught an American cockroach on one of the mouse snap traps. Note that the rear end of this cockroach is missing. What happened here is that a mouse eventually came along and ate those portions of the roach that were accessible. It is common for house mouse to eat large cockroaches often leaving the legs and wings behind.

Prepared by Dr. Hanif Gulmahamad, LAUSD IPM Coordinator

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From left to right. Norway rat scats, Roof rat scats, House mouse scats, and American cockroach droppings.



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