

#### New Info on the war on Fire Ants

DALLAS - Entomologists have achieved another milestone in the war against the red imported fire ant. This month phorid flies, a natural enemy of fire ants, were found on the county line between Denton and Wise counties.

The first population of the fire ant's natural enemy in North Texas, this colony is also the northernmost establishment of a phorid fly population in Texas to date. The same phorid fly species, *P. curvatis*, was found in Oklahoma after a release and has since crossed the Texas/Oklahoma state line.

This milestone didn't occur naturally or by accident. In the fall of 2004, Texas Cooperative Extension entomologists Kim Engler and Dr. Bart Drees, with help from local Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists, spent three weeks collecting fire ants.

The ants were then shipped to Gainesville, Fla., for one week. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service deposited the ants into chambers that also contained phorid flies. Over the course of that week, the female flies laid their eggs inside the thoracic region of the fire ants.

The ants were then flown back to North Texas and re-released into the colonies from which they were originally collected.

"This parasitic fly lays its eggs inside a fire ant worker," Engler said. "The larvae eats its way into the head capsule and eventually decapitates the ant. It then completes its development in the fire ant's head and emerges from there fully grown. If it's a female, it will mate then start the whole process over again. The entire process takes about one month."

<http://agnews.tamu.edu/dailynews/stories/ENTO/Oct3105b.htm>