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Aphis Mizzou Who?

MARCH 20TH 2013 BY DEE LOFLIN

Aphis Mizzou Who?

*Submitted by
Dee Loflin, SMT Manager/Writer*

Columbia, Missouri - Today is the first day of Spring here in the Heartland of Missouri. Most of us are thinking about the upcoming Winter Storm Watch and perhaps not the beautiful springtime planting season soon approaching.

The last thing on anyone's mind is *Aphis Mizzou*. What is that? You can probably figure that with the word Mizzou in the title, it has something to do with the University of Missouri Tigers. Nope! How about aphids? What is that?

Well the University of Missouri has Jesse Hall, Faurot Field, Memorial Union, the Tigers and the Columns. Now, MU has its own bug, an aphid to be exact.

An MU researcher has discovered a new insect on campus and given it a Mizzou name. Ben Puttler, assistant professor emeritus of plant sciences at the [College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources](#), first discovered *Aphis Mizzou* while conducting research on wasps on the MU campus.

The insect, *Aphis Mizzou*, is a member of the aphid family of bugs. Aphids are tiny insects that live by feeding on the sap of plants. Nearly all-annual and perennial plants, including shrubs and trees, are potential hosts for aphids. When feeding on these plants, aphids can crumple leaves, distort plant tissue and bend stems. There are 5,000 species of aphids known in the world, but only 150 live in North America.

"When I was researching how wasps feed on another type of aphid I noticed the differences between the *Aphis Mizzou* and other aphids I was observing," Puttler said. "Once I realized that this bug hadn't been identified, I decided to give the aphid a Mizzou name considering these bugs haven't been found anywhere besides the MU campus."

Puttler worked with Doris Lagos in the Department of Entomology at the University of Illinois to confirm that the insect had not been discovered previously. The bug's uniqueness was confirmed by molecular tests at the University of Illinois.

"What makes the *Aphis Mizzou* so unique is that the aphid has a five-segmented antenna, a black head, thorax and abdomen that seem to be dusted with a white wax," Puttler said. "The *Aphis Mizzou* is found by the student recreation complex due to the large amount of St. John's Wort plants, which is the plant on which the bug lives."

Puttler's current research is focusing on the biological control of pests and how naturally occurring beneficial insects and other biotic agents can fight crop pests and weeds. However, the *Aphis Mizzou* doesn't seem to be harming anything. It just wants to feed on the young leaves of the St. John's Wort plant, Puttler said.

[/images/Aphis Mizzou 1.gif](#)

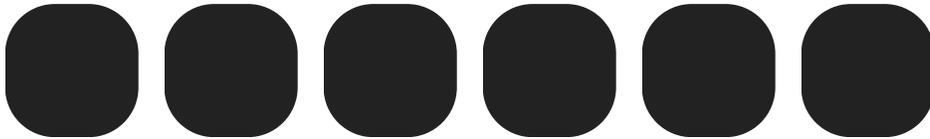
Puttler has discovered six bugs prior to the discovery of the *Aphis Mizzou*, including one in which he named after his wife.

Puttler said that most people wouldn't notice the *Aphis Mizzou*, as it is smaller than a grain of pepper. Let's hope Mizzou keeps their new aphid as we begin our spring planting.

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