

## **Critters on the Move**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Animals, insects, arachnids (spiders) literally any creature or plant, is inextricably tied to the natural world, the ecosystem, around it. It reacts to whatever Mother Nature throws at it. One of the basic rules of the natural world is that the population of any creature will be in direct correlation to the amount of food that it has to live on. There will be population cycle booms and busts as food becomes abundant and then becomes scarce. Some of these cycles run for several years, some for just a few weeks. A second principle of nature is that if food becomes scarce and you can't move, you die.

These two natural rules can explain a lot of what we are seeing right now and will be seeing through the rest of the summer and autumn up until about the time we have a good hard freeze. Whether we like it or not, we will have more spiders this year. We will have more spiders because spiders feed on insects. There are a lot of insects so spiders are abundant. As we start heading into cooler weather in another month many of these insects will start trying to move indoors. Right along with them will come the spiders.

Just as last year's drought started moving snakes, rodents and a whole host of other critters out of their normal habitats, this year's early summer rains have done the same. Many of them have been heading back to their normal haunts, but further heavy rains may interrupt those movements. Keep in mind that none of these critters are out intentionally to invade and take over your house. They are opportunistic however and they will take up residence, sometimes temporary, sometimes long term, in and around your house and associated structures. Lastly, many of them may have been living in close proximity to you for quite some time, you just never noticed it before.

There's no way to really STOP any of this from happening. Sometimes the best course of action is no action and just let things run their course. But before you break out the pesticides and start chemical warfare, you first need to take steps to simply exclude insects, spiders and anything larger from getting in your house. Some of this may mean some new screening, some repairs or simply some new caulking. In other cases it may mean changing habits.

It's amazing how many creatures enter our homes as we are coming and going in our daily routine. We don't look down when we open the door. We leave a door open for thirty seconds while unloading groceries from a car. I once watched a pigeon walk into the 4-H Building as someone opened the door and walked in. The individual didn't even know it had happened. Make sure windows, doors and screens on both of the above fit tightly. Many of the steps we take to keep cold drafts out in the winter work very well at keep insects out also. Teach everyone in the family not to leave doors open even for a few seconds and start learning to look down when entering and leaving your house.

Look for any cracks in foundations or gaps where utilities or air conditioning lines enter the building. Caulk those up with a good quality caulk. Keep weeds, grass and landscaping trimmed and neat to minimize hiding areas close to the house. Then as a last resort treat the outside of the house with a lawn and garden spray that has nuisance pests on the label. Spray this around on the foundation and out a few feet away from the house. Then use an indoor pest control product and treat just the thresholds of doorways and a little ways along the baseboard on either side of the door. You won't be able to stop all these critters, but through a combined effort you can minimize how many get inside!