

AG NOTES
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NOSTOC

I had two calls about this slime mess in the past month. I've had one or two over the years before, so I think this must have been a perfect year for this stuff. I've got a picture attached.

This black slimy stuff is called nostoc commune, the proper name, but others refer to it as nasty nostoc. It is actually a cyanobacterium, meaning it is a form of bacteria. It is considered a blue-green algae.

This particular mess showed up in a so-called dry lot, a lightly used part of a yard/drive area that is between house and barns. The owner actually was leading a horse across this lot and slipped and nearly fell, scaring her and the horse from her sudden movements. It is very slippery.

Nostoc is typically seen in areas with ample irrigation, poor drainage and abundant nutrients. When well-hydrated, these colonies are most obvious, but when dry they become dark, flaky sheets. The unique capabilities of these organisms, however, allow them to spring back to their former glory when water is reintroduced.

As Nostoc becomes more commonly established in soil, gravel or ground cloth-covered areas in plant nurseries, concerns over worker safety have increased. The colonies can cause a slip hazard, and it is also visually unappealing. This bacterium is a wet slime in moist conditions, such as the wet period that we have experienced this spring. And the temperatures have been perfect for its development.

There are a couple of treatments. The short-term fix is an application of copper sulfate or copper octanoate, especially for a small area. For larger areas that are economically important, a herbicide called Scythe gives best results.

The long-term treatment is to add more gravel to the traffic areas to block sunlight from hitting the soil surface.



BIRDS

I'm not an avid 'professional' bird watcher. Some folks get pretty serious at looking for birds. I appreciate these folks for being dedicated to their cause and providing information and pictures with folks like me who have an interest.

But I do like to watch the birds that come by our feeders during the year. I appreciate the cardinals, the juncos, the black-capped chickadees, the woodpeckers that come by. Granny Teague always had a family of mocking birds that would sit close to and feed from her back porch. She would talk to them and listen to their sounds.

I especially like seeing the bluebirds that come to the nest boxes that our 4-H clubs helped get into the community years ago in response to the need for nesting places for these blue gems. We still have one in sight of the back door, and except for when it was hijacked by some wrens, these bluebirds have returned and are now raising their second hatch.

I do appreciate the hummingbirds, and when you consider how far they migrate and how active they are, they are a good addition to the landscape to watch when they come to feed.

I always appreciated the return of the barn swallows every spring and watching them swoop while they were feeding. Raising their offspring in the nests under the loft floors and watching the parents feed the little ones' open mouths was being a witness to Mother Nature.

When the wind blew down the barns, I was there when they returned, just flying in chaos trying to find the barns they had left last fall. It was sad. They have had to start a new chapter in their generation just as we have had to.

We have watched a red-tailed hawk raise two babies in a big nest in the top of a tall tree next to one of our pastures. That's a first. Piper had to show it to Hank and Ford. That was a treat for all of them, her to show it and them to see it!

I did get an email with a picture of a bird I've never seen before. It is a red-breasted grosbeak. I'll admit that I don't know anything about this one, except it is pretty and these folks who sent the picture watch a pair of them, this year marks the first time. I thought I'd share this, in case you might see one and wonder what it is.

Birds are biblical. They have a special place and service. Entertainment is one. Think about it.



CFAP

As I mentioned before, the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) for farmers recovering from price drops due to the pandemic is big in the farm news. USDA's Farm Service Agency is taking applications for livestock and crop producers who suffered losses of value on animals and crops in their operations.

I have copies of some of the forms for farmers to use in putting together the basic information on certain animals and non-specialty crops (corn and soybeans) that the USDA has provided. These forms are simple and will help in completion of the application process.

I will be sending these out to my email groups. For more information contact me a jteague1@utk.edu and I'll be glad to send these to anyone wanting a copy.

FARMERS MARKET

We are still not ready with enough vendors and products. Remember, last year we were not able to open until the third week of June because of the same weather pattern. I'm hoping that we can do something earlier than that. Keep watching.