Soapberry Borer, *Agrilus prionurus* (Coleoptera: Buprestidae): Attack Characteristics and Known Distribution of an Invasive Pest of Western Soapberry in Texas.

Ronald F. Billings and Herbert A. Pase III, Texas Forest Service

The soapberry borer (*Agrilus prionurus*), a native of Mexico, was first reported in Travis County in 2003 infesting western soapberry (*Sapindus saponaria* var. *drummondii*). Since then, trees infested with this insect have been detected in 33 counties, including near or within the cities of Fort Worth, Dallas, Waco, College Station, Austin, Houston and Corpus Christi.

As its populations expand rapidly in Texas, this buprestid is killing all sizes of soapberry trees > 2 inches DBH. It may eventually threaten western soapberry populations throughout the tree's range, which extends from northern Mexico to Missouri, and west to Arizona.

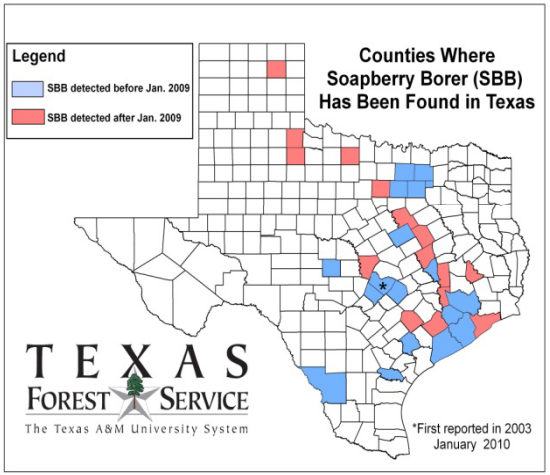
Leaves of western soapberry, a medium-sized, drought-hardy tree, resemble those of the invasive Chinaberry, but are not double compound and the leaflets do not have serrated (toothed) margins. Infestations of soapberry borer are similar to those of emerald ash borer, *Agrilus planipennis*, a close relative not yet found in Texas.

Infested trees can be easily recognized by the exposed sapwood that results when birds and squirrels chip off the bark to feed on the larvae. Bark chips accumulate at the base of the tree. A heavily-infested tree will be completely girdled by white larvae feeding beneath the bark.

The adult beetle is about ½ inch-long, shining black and distinctively marked with four small white spots on the wing covers. Larvae are flat-headed wood borers that may attain an inch or more in length as they mature. After feeding beneath the bark, the larvae bore into the wood to complete development and to pupate. The adult leaves a D-shaped exit hole as it emerges. Western soapberry appears to be this insect's sole host in Texas and the tree exhibits little resistance to this introduced pest. The insect appears to have one generation per year and methods of prevention and control are under investigation.

For more information or to report new infestations, contact Ron Billings (rbillings@tfs.tamu.edu) or visit www.texasinvasives.org.

Characteristic symptoms of *A. prionurus* infestations

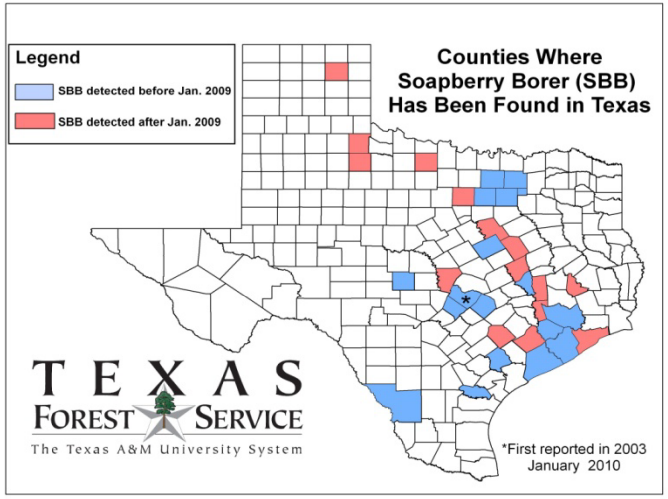


Adults of *A. prionurus* (note 4 white spots)

D-shaped exit hole

Desirable landscape soapberry tree killed near Houston

Western soapberry foliage and fruit


Legend
SBB detected before Jan. 2009
SBB detected after Jan. 2009
Counties Where
Soapberry Borer (SBB)
Has Been Found in Texas
*
TEXAS
FOREST SERVICE
The Texas A&M University System
*First reported in 2003
January 2010