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Senior Biology Major Conducted Stink Bug Research and Shared Her Findings

Winthrop University

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Senior Biology Major Conducted Stink Bug Research and Shared Her Findings

Quick Facts

- Shelby Kerr, a Mount Pleasant, S.C., resident who graduates on Saturday from Winthrop with a biology degree, spent the last few months studying the life span and reproductive cycle of the stink bug.
- Scientists believe the brown marmorated stink bug (scientific name, *Halyomorpha halys*) was brought to America from China and has slowly migrated down the East Coast to South Carolina and even out West.



Shelby Kerr

ROCK HILL, S.C. – With the **brown marmorated stink bug** slowly invading South Carolina, farm groups are looking to researchers such as **senior Shelby Kerr** to fight the smelly pest.

Kerr, a Mount Pleasant, S.C., resident who graduates on Saturday from Winthrop with a **biology degree**, spent the last few months studying the life span and reproductive cycle of the stink bug. One goal is to learn enough about the bug so its destruction of crops can be limited.



Scientists believe the brown marmorated stink bug (**scientific name, *Halyomorpha halys***) was brought to America from China and has slowly migrated down the East Coast to South Carolina and even out West.

Kerr's advisor, **Professor of Biology Paula Mitchell**, said that although the stink bugs can move to new locations by flying, they are also hitching rides on vehicles. The small brown bug with the triangular-shaped back has been sighted in Rock Hill in just the last year.

Farmers fear it because the bugs feed in large numbers on fruits such as peaches; they affect legumes and possibly munch on citrus. The bugs also can be an **urban pest** to invade homes in large numbers.

Kerr spent her research time studying how long the bug lives, estimating it survives from May to October. Females can lay up to 400 eggs in a lifetime. "They're very resilient," she said. "You can starve them and they will survive. They survive in extreme situations."

She checked the bug eggs in the **Dalton Hall** lab daily to see their progress, even over fall break.

The stink bug study was Kerr's first experience working in a laboratory setting. Earlier in her college experience she worked as a teaching assistant in botany but found the lab setting rewarding because it encouraged independence. Now, she wants to use her biology degree to work on sustainable agriculture, possibly at **Disney World** where she completed an internship.

Kerr presented her findings in October to the **59th Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Entomological Society** and won an **outstanding undergraduate award** for her stink bug findings presentation. **Clemson Extension Service** workers were particularly interested in her work where she proposed testing an alcohol-based extract of peppermint to spray on crops or trees to discourage the stink bugs. "A botanical deterrent would be safer for the environment than an insecticide," Kerr

said.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw** at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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