

The Golden Buprestid Beetle

Metallic green and burnished copper better describes the colors on this three-fourths inch long beetle, but its accepted common name is Golden Buprestid. The species name Buprestis aurulenta tells us that whoever named this beetle was thinking of golden jewels and this family of beetles is referred to as the metallic woodborers, many of which are brightly colored. Specimens of the Golden Buprestid are brought to the MG clinic every summer. People are curious to know its name and what it does, but frequently an observant client implicates this insect with fresh holes in their furniture or the walls of their house. They might find wood dust below a hole in the wood and some have even observed the shiny beetle emerging from a freshly opened hole. Sometimes it is only circumstantial evidence such as finding the beetle on the windowsill near the hole in the wood of the window frame.

The female golden Buprestid beetle lays her eggs in the bark of fir and pine trees, usually in a scar or break in the bark of a live tree or a freshly cut log. The egg hatches into a white grub that feeds on the wood, chewing increasingly larger tunnels as it grows. The larva grows slowly, especially if the wood is dry as in lumber. There are records of larvae taking as long as 40 years to complete their life cycle and emerge from the wood as adults. So do not be surprised if these beetles show up in your house many years after it is built. Fortunately, the female beetle will not lay eggs on wood that is smooth and painted or varnished, so once the beetles emerge, just fill up the holes and keep the pretty beetle to show your friends as a conversation piece.

We have several other members of the family Buprestidae or Metallic Wood Borers in Skagit County. Out of the 700 species in North America, many live in the western forests and feed on a wide variety of trees. One that is of concern to gardeners is the Pacific Flatheaded Borer (Chrysobothris mali). Its species name refers to apple trees and it is a serious threat to young apple trees as well as other fruit trees and related ornamental trees and shrubs. When new trees that were grown in a protected nursery row are planted out in the sun, frequently the stem will sunburn. That "sore" bark gives off a chemical odor that attracts the flatheaded borer and they lay their eggs on that spot. The larva chews into the stem and may girdle the young tree and kill it. Incriminating evidence of the evil work of this borer may be detected in the shape of the tunnel it makes in the host tree. The head and body of the larva are flattened instead of round (hence the common name Flatheaded Borer for the whole family Buprestidae, Metallic Woodborers) so the tunnels it chews in the wood will be oval in cross section. The tunnels are usually tightly packed with boring dust arranged in ridges forming patterns something like finger prints. These adult beetles are not as colorful and not as large as the Golden Buprestid. They are bronzy black and smaller, usually about 3/8 inch long. They are not easy to see, so look carefully.



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