

Greetings from Ghana #13

What's Bugging You?

When you get ready to travel to Ghana you need to get shots and pills so that you will not succumb to the insects here. There are mosquitos here that can put you under with malaria and they are not in rural areas only. It really does not matter if you are in the city or on the farm. They are out there. So it is recommended you start taking a pill a couple days before you enter the area and then continue for a week after you leave that area (which is pretty much anywhere in Africa).

That is all fine and dandy for a short trip but I had not planned on taking one pill a day for the next few years. I brought it up to a friend of mine who is a pharmacist here. "Look," he said, "You have seen your friends here get malaria, right?" I have seen more than a handful of friends end up in the hospital on IVs to treat malaria. "Well," he said, "that is what happens with THEIR level of immunity. You have less. If you get bit and you are not taking the anti-malaria drug you are going to be in worse shape than they were. Take it for 6 months to build up your system before you even consider stopping." So I am.

I have yet to be bitten by a mosquito and do what I can to prevent myself from being "white boy buffet" to them. I have some of those mosquito lamps that have the blue light that is said to attract mosquitos. The idea being they fly to the light and get zapped by a grid around the exterior. I have seen a few that got into the electrical grid but I almost feel as if they happened to fly into it by accident as I have been more than once typing away with the lamp active and had mosquitos doing fly by exercises near my head apparently oblivious to (according to the product flier) "the miracle product that wipes them out by the droves."

Mosquitos aside, the bugs you see here are remarkable. There are dragon flies, praying mantis, beautiful butterflies, termites, jumping spiders, cockroaches you could saddle – okay about 2 inches by a half inch wide, but they seem massive – and ants. All sorts of ants. Like you would not believe. . . ants.

When we first moved in here we found cockroaches everywhere (**after** we had moved in). Diatomaceous earth took care of them and is keeping them at bay. We also had ants (the standard kind) in the kitchen. Some of our EXO-Ant Killer took care of them. You could tell because they piled up like small mounds of pepper. We were very pleased with ourselves for about four days.

Our house happens to sit on what we have discovered is an ant highway. After we got rid of the kitchen ants we had a problem with them in the master bedroom. They were climbing up the exterior walls and entering under the window sills. Again, the ant killer was deployed and again it worked. For there.

The next incident found ants climbing up the back wall and disappearing into a couple of holes about \circ that big. (Without pointy characters I am hoping you recognize that "o" as the illustration). They were in the walls. We used the ant killer again and 24 hours later added some caulk to the holes. We began seeing this as becoming a game of "Whack a Mole," but figured we were winning.

Wrong.

They build here with concrete. After the wall is in place the electrician goes back and cuts channels for the wiring and holes for switches and outlets. The cement is then skim coated and you do not see where the cuts were made. But there are apparently vacancies left in the channel and while we can't see them because they are buried we soon discovered they were a pathway for the ants. Well, almost. The channels just needed to be open up a bit to allow the traffic. And the ants did that.

We began finding piles of sand on the floor and counters as the ants dug in and began expanding their tunnels. We did not see a lot of ants but the sand was everywhere and soon began acting as an insulator in the switches and the outlets. The ants also began to limit the functionality of the electrical system. More than once we turned on a switch and heard a crackle as one or more ants became crispy critters. And in the course of about three weeks all of the outlets in the kitchen and about one third of the outlets and switches on the south end of the house became inoperable.

The ants were entering through an exterior electrical outlet. As soon as we figured that out the outlet was foamed behind the receptacle. Problem solved. Not really.

The back of the house faces east. Once we had pretty much sealed everywhere we could find on the east side the ant assault changed direction. I went to bed one night and found ants between the sheets and on my pillow. The ants were now coming in from the west.

Welcome to today. We walk the exterior every few days to inspect and look for trails. One strong indicator that something has changed and another wave is underway is to simply look at the floor under my desk. The new ants are tiny, about $_$ that big. And they bite. I saw one dragging a fly the other day. When they start a new assault they come up the west wall and into the office and start across the floor. I will feel something on my leg, look down, and see several hundred massing around my feet. At which point I will go get two different solutions.

Oregano oil and vinegar mixed with water makes a solution that messes with their nerves. I spray that on the floor and then put the other ant killer on where they are coming in from the outside.

The Asante' tribe (the largest tribe in Ghana) have a saying about their warriors, "If you kill one thousand another thousand will rise up to replace them." I think they got the idea from ants.

Yesterday, I sat down to my laptop and began writing. The exercise was quickly stopped as ants began running out from between the keys. They quickly met their demise.

These ants will chew through plastic to get to food. They will get into packages of crackers, chew into oatmeal cartons, infest ziplock bags of bread. We have even found them where they have crawled into the refrigerator's freezer compartment.

Through it all we have learned a few things. If it is a starch, like crackers, it goes in the freezer. If it is an ingredient like flour or oats it goes into a heavy plastic carton with a sealable lid. And most importantly, if you are sitting at the desk and an ant climbs up your leg and bites you in a certain area. . . the instinctive reaction to slap the offending insect strong enough to kill it should be restrained.