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‘Splatology’ pioneer puts UK insect roadkill under microscope

**~ insect expert Dr. Mark Hostetler enlists national car valet Motorclean to
identify bug juice on British car bonnets ~**

Have you ever wondered what insect had just hit your car? Thanks to its size, colour and texture, each splat leaves a clue which UK drivers can now train to decipher online.

Expert ‘Splatologist’ Dr. Mark Hostetler, Associate Professor at the Department of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation at the University of Florida, cracked this code and wrote a prize-winning book ‘That Gunk on Your Car’ to spread the word. The research for his book, which shows what kind of marks different kinds of insects leave, involved Mark driving 12,000 miles over 12 months. He also visited lots of bus stations across the U.S., to examine splats left on larger surface areas.

During his trek, where he sometimes discovered entire windshields covered in insect splats, Mark found that particular insect groups were commonly found on windshields. Do these sorts of patterns in insect splats occur in the UK?

UK car valeting company Motorclean has offered to collect data from some of the thousands of vehicles it cleans across the country every day to find out. Valeters, trained in the science of ‘Splatology’ and using Mark’s book, will send him information on the number and nature of the insects they observe.

Motorclean, which operates the valeting concession at Bluewater (and soon other major retail centres in the north), also hopes to highlight the damage caused to car finishes by some of the 51 billion insects* which meet a sticky end on our vehicles annually. Insect corpses are acidic and can eat away at paintwork, leaving stains if they aren’t removed in time.

To train to be a Splatologist make a beeline for www.motorclean.net where you'll find an instructive guide to the most common splats in the UK (along with tips to clean them off), an interactive game and a short video about the project. You can also send an email to splat@motorclean.net with a (less than 100kb) picture of any splats you've picked up, along with information about the location and time. Motorclean will pass the most interesting examples to Dr. Hostetler.

Dr. Mark Hostetler at the University of Florida said: "It's not quite CSI but I've spent a lot of time examining the fronts of cars and buses to determine the origins of the gunk different kinds of insects leave behind. I predict moths will be one of the main causes of splats in the UK, but the splat descriptions in the book will help you figure out the truth behind those and many other insect/vehicle encounters. Crazy? Yes! But I'm trying to advance the study of insects in an accessible way, to communicate about science and the environment so those outside the field get enthused. It will be interesting to see what Motorclean reports back."

David Warren, managing director at Motorclean said: "We knew about the corrosive potential of dead insects, but becoming involved with Mark has opened our eyes to how important the study of insects actually is. For example, knowing that certain insects now live further north can be an indicator of climate change. Bring your vehicles in and we'll have a good go at identifying the culprits, before we clean them off!"

*The UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds carried out a large study into the quantity (as opposed to type) of insects around Britain in 2004, to detect any changes in the supply of food for birds. 40,000 volunteers drove 1,624,070 miles, recording 324,814 splats using a special grid placed over their number plates. With UK drivers travelling over 8,349 miles per year, 1,670 insects must die on each number plate. With over 31 million cars on the road, 51bn insects are estimated to meet that fate in this way alone every year (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>)

Notes to editors

Dr. Mark Hostetler

Dr. Mark Hostetler is an Associate Professor, Department of Wildlife Ecology & Conservation, University of Florida (UF). With over fifteen years of experience in urban wildlife and natural resource issues, Dr. Hostetler conducts research and outreach on how urban landscapes could be designed and managed, from small to large scales, to become more resource efficient. He has extensive experience in working with homeowners, developers, and policymakers on ways to manage and

design residential developments; many of his outreach programs have obtained both state and national awards. Dr. Hostetler co-founded UF's Program for Resource Efficient Communities and collaborates with an interdisciplinary team of scientists and graduate students. Currently, he is working with several developers and municipalities to help foster natural resource conservation strategies in communities that are billed as "green" developments.

Dr. Hostetler has a bachelor's in biology from Purdue University (1987) and his master's (1992) and doctorate in zoology (1997) are both from University of Florida.

That Gunk on Your Car, which won the international IG Nobel prize for improbable research can be ordered from major online bookshops: its ISBN number is ISBN 0-89815-961-X.

Dr. Hostetler's Living Green web site is at: www.livinggreen.ifas.ufl.edu

Motorclean

Founded in 1976, Motorclean is a management-owned car valeting business. It's the single largest provider of valeting services to UK car dealerships, with clients such as the Marshall Motor Group and Inchcape. Motorclean also provides valeting services for private drivers at select locations such as Bluewater, Europe's largest retailer.

www.motorclean.net

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