

# SPOTLIGHT

## MILKWEED APHID



Milkweed aphids (*Aphis nerii*) on common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) by railroad tracks along the Schuylkill River, Center City. A winged female is shown at the top.

Milkweed aphids, also called oleander aphids, were introduced from southern Europe into the southernmost United States, from which they annually fly north and re-colonize milkweed patches. The aphids do not overwinter in Philadelphia. How do these insects, which measure less than 3 mm, colonize widely scattered, small patches of milkweed and then mate, lay eggs, and re-establish aphid populations in Philadelphia all in one season? They accomplish this feat, at least in part, by elimination of courtship, mating and egg laying: The entire population of aphids consists exclusively of females, which reproduce asexually and bear their young live. A group of giant superclones constitutes the species in North America. Whether populations in Philadelphia make return flights to the south at the end of the season is unknown.<sup>1</sup>