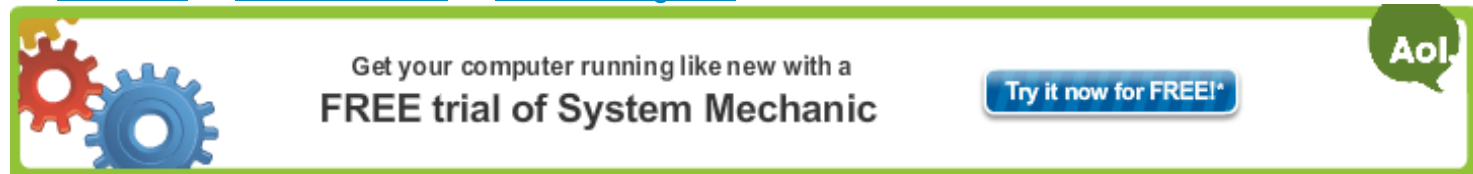


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Icerya Purchasi, Cottony Cushion Scales, 'Could Eliminate The Need For Males'

The Huffington Post [James Gerken](#)

First Posted: 7/29/11 12:09 PM ET Updated: 7/29/11 12:39 PM ET

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Perhaps women really *don't* need men. [According to researchers at Oxford University](#), hermaphroditism and self-mating among cottony cushion scales (*Icerya purchasi*) is leading to the disappearance of male members of the species.

The insects, found worldwide, are able to mate with themselves in a bizarre process that is extremely rare in the animal kingdom.

[According to Discover Blogs](#), the insect, which occupies a female body, is left with a parasite by its father which produces sperm. This parasitic sperm also infects the offspring after conception, continuing the cycle of self-reproducing females. Not only are the new insects hermaphroditic, they are also incestuous, the blog writes. In fact, the self-reproducing insects become father, mother, grandfather and grandmother to all of their grandchildren.

[ScienceDaily](#) reports that researchers Andy Gardner and Laura Ross found "once the parasitic fathers become widespread in a population, females will be inclined to reproduce with them instead of regular males."

Despite the implications for male cottony cushion scales, [Wired.co.uk writes that this trend has only been observed](#) in the past three years. The future disappearance of the male insect [has only been predicted with a mathematical model](#).

While the cottony cushion scale is [one of only three insects](#) to exhibit this behavior, many other insects and animals [engage in strange mating rituals](#). While hermaphroditism [is most common in invertebrates](#) like snails and slugs, [some fish also exhibit this trait](#).

Several weeks ago, [researchers at London's Natural History Museum](#) were stunned by the birth of a half-male, half-female butterfly. A battle of the sexes is also occurring among African bat bugs, which [according to NewScientist](#), "turn transsexual to avoid stabbing penises." *Photo courtesy of Pau Artigas.*

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