

Mosquito Control: Just how big, bad are Collier mosquitoes? Tell us and win big, er, win something

By JEFFREY C. STIVERS, Special to the Daily News

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Hallelujah! The rainy season has finally arrived, turning Naples green and reducing the risk of wild fires.

*#@**#&#&! The rainy season finally arrived, portending the hoards of bloodsucking mosquitoes and destructive hurricanes that may soon arrive in Naples.

With these kinds of choices, it is a wonder that everyone who lives here isn't a little schizophrenic.

While the Naples area has been relatively free from mosquito attacks since last November, the mosquitoes have been out there, in one form or another. While residents may not see them, mosquitoes are just waiting for the rains and high tides of summer so that they can return in their billions.

Where have all the mosquitoes been hiding during our long dry winter? It all depends on the type of mosquito.

The mosquitoes that are our biggest biting problem, the black salt marsh mosquito and the freshwater mosquito *Psorophora columbiae*, have been with us all winter. Fortunately for area residents, they weren't around as adults, but as eggs. The females of these mosquitoes deposit their eggs on soil in areas that are prone to flooding, hence their designation as flood water mosquitoes

The eggs of these mosquitoes can remain in the soil for extended periods, some for several years, without harm. When heavy rains or high tides flood the eggs, most, but not all of them, will hatch into larvae simultaneously. This leads to the massive influx of adult mosquitoes, with which residents are all too familiar, as the larvae become adults and emerge, nearly all at the same time.

The eggs that do not hatch with the first flooding may hatch as a result of flooding later in the season, or even in a subsequent season.

Many other mosquitoes, such as *Culex nigripalpus*, the vector of West Nile virus, pass the winter as adults. The females of these types of mosquitoes survive the dry season by finding sheltered resting places with high humidity. These resting places can be in culverts, drainage pipes, the crawl space of buildings, under rocks, around the roots of trees, in animal burrows, or any other location that will remain moist and cool, without freezing.

With the advent of the rainy season, these mosquitoes come out of hiding to lay eggs in standing water. As the rainy season progresses, more areas are flooded and retain water, providing more places for an ever increasing number of fertile females to deposit eggs. The slow, but steady, increase in this type of mosquito over the course of the summer generally means that high populations aren't reached until later in the season. Once water levels stabilize, however, there is a constant production of mosquitoes until everything dries out in the winter.

In essence, floodwater mosquitoes come earlier in the season and in immediately high numbers, while standing-water mosquitoes come later in the season, building more slowly to peak numbers.

Anyone who has lived here for any length of time knows that the Naples area has the biggest and baddest mosquitoes around. A recent letter from reader RK pointed this out and provided the spark for a contest to find the best description of our Naples mosquitoes.

RK, even though he doesn't know it yet, is the first entry in our contest. He described the size of the mosquitoes out on the Trail as being big enough to "stand flat-footed and kick a wild turkey in the butt."

What is your way of describing the size or viciousness of our Naples mosquitoes? E-mail, snail-mail or fax your description (436-1005) to me using the information below. If you use e-mail, please put "Contest" in the subject line so your entry doesn't get deleted with all the spam.

Also, please indicate that we can use your name if your description is selected as a finalist.

The Collier Mosquito Control District (CMCD) staff will select the 10 best descriptions from all entries received by 5 p.m. July 30.

The descriptions received by that date will be printed in a subsequent article so readers can vote for their favorite description.

The lucky winner of the popular vote will be printed in a follow-up article. The winner can look forward to some fabulous prizes from the CMCD. Well, maybe not so fabulous, but at least fun and educational.

While you work up your entry, be thinking about our mosquitoes. The rainy season is here and the mosquitoes won't be far behind. It's time to dig out the long-sleeve shirts and repellent once again.

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