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Michigan State University

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Cluster Flies

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CLUSTER FLIES, *Pollenia rudis*, are large, black bumbling flies that can invade homes in fall and become a nuisance throughout the winter and following spring. They look like house flies; however, they are slightly larger. Also, they do not have conspicuous stripes on the upper surface of the thorax between the wings. They can be identified by the presence of golden hairs underneath the base of the wings.

Cluster flies can become a nuisance because they enter buildings in fall in search of a place to spend the winter. Often large numbers will enter through cracks around loose fitting screens, in siding and along eaves. They search out dark places such as wall voids and attics and can congregate in large masses. Once in the house, if they become warm they are attracted to light. Because of this, they may move into living areas of the house through window casings or other wall openings.

LIFE HISTORY

In spring, cluster flies leave their overwintering sites when the air temperature is about 50°F. The adults may feed at flowers or sap and begin laying eggs when the temperature reaches about 80°F. The eggs are laid in soil crevices, and when the larvae hatch out they seek out earthworms in which to develop. The length of the life cycle from egg to adult is about one month. During the summer, three or four generations of adults may be produced.

In late summer when the temperature falls to the mid 50's, the adult flies stop outdoor activity and begin seeking shelter. They may congregate in tree holes, under debris or in buildings. Throughout the winter, if their hiding places become warm, they will resume activity.

CONTROL MEASURES

Cluster fly control starts with measures aimed at keeping the flies out of dwellings. When they are seeking shelter, the flies have the habit of congregating on the sunny sides of buildings. They gradually move upward until they find a point of entry. Thus, all cracks in siding and along eaves should be sealed to prevent flies from gaining entry to the house.

In the house, some control measures may be used. If flies have congregated in accessible spaces such as attics, a 2 percent malathion spray directed onto



Fig. 1. Preserved specimen showing golden hairs under base of wing.

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the flies will control them. Unfortunately, most flies congregate in inaccessible spaces and cannot be controlled by a direct spray. In this case, a spray containing DDVP (also called *Vapona*, or dichlorvos), applied as a spot spray to areas over which the flies would enter the living quarters, is the best control. Areas to check for fly entry would be window pulleys, around electrical outlets, near cold air returns, etc.

If flies are congregating at windows, inside a house, a pyrethrum fly spray will control them. A

vacuum cleaner can be used to collect the flies, or the basic flyswatter approach may also be tried.

Cluster fly control may never be completely successful. As the larvae develop in earthworms, many adult flies can be produced. Also, the flies can fly for great distances, so earthworm control is not justified. Finally, due to their habit of overwintering in dark spaces, once they get into a house they will become a nuisance. The preventive measures aimed at keeping the flies out of the house are sure to be the most effective.