



Setting the Trap

By Neil Newman

Editor's Note: "From Across The Country" in this issue means from central Wisconsin. Phil Pellitteri introduced me, via e-mail, to Neil Newman and his invention to trap deer flies and horseflies, very bothersome pests at times on Wisconsin golf courses. Neil graciously put this piece together for The Grass Roots. If you are interested in his invention, his address is included so you may contact him directly.

In many parts of the state, when the golf season is in full swing, so is the horsefly and deerfly season. These pesky critters flying around your head can be more than a distraction; their bite can be downright painful. Unlike a mosquito, which has a hypodermic needle-like proboscis to suck up your blood, the

horsefly and deerfly (both are in the Tabanid family) have mouth parts that are blade-like for cutting through the skin. The fly then sponges up the oozing blood. The bite is painful because it inflicts a lot of damage to the skin. If this doesn't ruin your golf game concentration, I guess nothing else will.

So, what can be done about the problem? First you have to know a little about the life cycle of these flies. There are over thirty species of blood feeding horseflies and deerflies in Wisconsin. Canada reports to have 135 species. Like the mosquito, it is only the female that bites. Unlike the mosquito, these flies are only day feeders, so they are only hunting for a blood meal when golfers are on the links.



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Horseflies lay their eggs on stems or leaves, usually over moist soil that will, in a week or so, become the larval habitat. Eggs laid on leaves and grass blades escape many of the predators that would eat them if laid directly on the land. These larvae then overwinter in the soil where they may live more than a year and travel considerable distances through the soil. Horsefly larvae are savage predators, capturing their prey, usually the larvae of other insects, with their sharp sickle-shaped mandibles and paralyzing them with an injection of venom like a rattlesnake. Horsefly larvae are capable of a painful bite if handled. Deerfly larvae have a similar set of mandibles with venom glands, but no one is sure what their food consists of.

The adult flies are capable of flying over a mile from their breeding sites, which are usually near swamps, marshes and along pond and stream banks. The University of Manitoba reports measuring the speed of these flies at over 60 miles per hour when they are on the trail of "the love of their life."

What can you do? No satisfactory chemical control has been developed for these insects. The preferred wetland habitat that support the larvae make it impractical and environmentally unacceptable to treat breeding sites. Adults do not rest on predictable surfaces, so residual insecticide treatments are not effective. Fogging or the use of aerosol insecticides only knock down what is present at the time of treatment, but more flies can migrate into an area in a matter of minutes.

There is one time in the life cycle of these flies when they are vulnerable. That is when the adult female is looking for a blood meal. She is a visual hunter. A trap is commercially available to take advantage of these circumstances. The trap is called the HORSE PAL. Originally developed, with guidance from the University of Wisconsin Extension, for the horse industry, it is finding wide acceptance among swimming pool owners, summer camps, and others that just want to be free of these pests. The trap has a target that attracts the fly. When it finds that the target is not a blood meal, the trap takes advantage of the fly's nature and leads it into a capture bottle on the top of the trap where the fly is soon killed by the heat of the sun. The trap was developed on a fly infested 135-acre farm in mid-Wisconsin. After three years of trapping development, there are no longer enough flies present to continue meaningful development on the farm.

Further information about horseflies, deerflies and the trap can be found on the HORSE PAL internet web site www.bitingflies.com or by calling toll free 1-888-685-2244. ♡

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