

Know your enemy

By Sarah Sobanski

Remember when you were a kid, you put a cup over your mouth and sucked until all the air was out of the cup? Don't black fly bites look like the suction marks those cups left? They're huge, they're red and they're so, so itchy!

That's right, with the warm weather come all those little things that carve out your flesh to feed their young. We've all had a few good chunks taken out of us by this year ? just waiting for the point in the season where you're more bug saliva/venom than blood and they give up on you altogether.

Believe it or not, Algonquin Park says few insects prefer to feast on humans. We just happen to be in the right place at the right time.

The park has a **PSA on insects**, their flight times and how best to avoid them up on its website. Below are the peak months you might want to consider just staying inside for?

According to the site, there are 161 types of black flies ? that's 42 species that have been recorded in Algonquin Park. Luckily, only four enjoy devouring people, most prefer birds. Their peak season is from the end of May to the end of June ? they love hot, humid days.

?Black flies develop in moving water and then emerge to fly as adults, with only the females requiring a blood meal to develop eggs. Females bite thin skin areas and will often land and crawl for some distance before biting. Black flies cut and rupture the skin and then soak up the blood,? states the park. If that doesn't make you shiver, I don't know what will.

But which is worse, a black flies or mosquitoes?

According to the park, mosquitoes are most abundant in June but they're out from mid-May until the end of August ? out from dusk and the first hours of night. They ?start their life as eggs that can sit dormant for many years before hatching under ideal conditions. Eggs are usually placed in calm water, such as beaver ponds, with larvae living just below the water's surface.?

Mosquitoes are attracted to carbon dioxide and heat. You'll find them in shady, forested areas. So when you're hiking just try not to breathe too much.

Then there's the black fly's larger, angrier cousin ? deer or horse flies. ?Unlike the sucking mouth parts of a mosquito, these insects have biting mouth parts that occasionally feel like they are ?taking a chunk of skin' as a meal,? states the park. Plus, insect repellent is less effective on them.

Flying about in the daylight, these ?visual feeders [are] attracted to motion, [they] circle humans waiting for a good time to land and obtain a meal.?

If insects were zombies in a movie, horse/deer flies would be the scarier zombie breed the director inevitably introduces to the film near the second half ? you know, when the heroes are just starting to get the hang of the apocalypse. Except the apocalypse is the summer, and these zombies last from the end of June to mid August.

Seriously, it's in levels. Pass the blackflies, you get mosquitoes. Pass them, you level up to horse and deer flies. If you make it out of that alive, try stable flies and no-see-ums. Stable flies prefer to bite ankles and feet and are most abundant in July and August.

?Biting midges, also known as no-see-ums or sandflies, measure 1 to 4 mm in length and are nearly invisible to humans. Females require a blood meal for reproduction and can bite humans, leaving a burning sensation on the skin and irritation from the human body's reaction to the protein in their saliva. Biting midges can be active day or night and are most often discovered by those with

small holes in their tents or RVs.?

Algonquin Park says knowing the ins and outs of your biting enemies can help you keep safe. It recommends covering up in light colours and using insect repellent.

Best of luck, my friends.