

Deer flies merciless this year

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By Chris Drost

Nothing ruins a day by the lake more than an attack by deer flies. Known scientifically as *Chrysops stpp.*, these aggressive flies feed on the blood of humans and other animals. They have dark bands across their wings and coloured eyes similar to those of horse flies, which are much larger in size.

Deer flies abound in warm weather and rely on colour, movement or carbon dioxide to find hosts, including people and their pets. Fortunately, they prefer to stay in wet habitats such as near marshes, streams and lakes, and for the most part, avoid entering your home or cottage, unlike mosquitos which are happy to take up residence in your home or cottage at this time of year.

It is the female deer fly that is the blood feeder. According to the Wikipedia description, "Once the deer fly lands on her host, she uses her scissor-like mandibles and maxillae to make a cross-shaped incision and then laps up the blood." Interestingly, the males prefer a diet of pollen and nectar from plants. The known natural predators of deer flies are frogs, toads, spiders, wasps, hornets, dragonflies and some species of birds.

Fortunately, the lifespan of a deer fly is only 30-60 days and they primarily invade our area between late June and mid-August and mercifully, are not around after dark. Suggested ways of reducing your chance of being bitten are to cover up, wear a hat as they seem to be attracted to your head (as opposed to horse flies that go for your legs) and consider using an insect repellent. Keep an eye on your pet as they too seem to be magnets for these pesky flies. There are actually sticky patches you can put on your hat to trap the pests, or as one internet-based post suggested, put a muddy fern on top of your hat. The flies will apparently circle the fern and leave you alone.

The good news is that unlike mosquitos, deer flies here in North Hastings really do seem to largely disappear once August rolls around.