

HOT NEWS

SWARMS OF GNATS

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With the recent flooding in south-central Indiana we have been getting numerous calls concerning biting and non-biting gnats and small flies. What appears to be happening is a surge of biting midges (e.g., *Culicoides*, no-see-ums, punkies), black flies, and non-biting gnats (e.g., fungus gnats).

There are several species of biting midges that occur in Indiana. They breed in many of the same habitats as mosquitoes. These tiny insects can feel like mosquitoes when they bite but are very small to the naked eye. Because of the varied semi-aquatic to aquatic habitats they will breed in control is not feasible.

Black flies are also a biting fly that often occur in larger numbers in the spring. They breed in clean, swift-flowing streams. Adults emerge in the spring and they can be aggressive biters, especially on exposed skin (e.g., arms, neck area, legs). They are often seen in swarms hovering together. They are usually active for a 6 to 8 week period in late spring and early summer.



Adult biting midge, *Culicoides sonorensis* (Wirth and Jones), showing blood-filled abdomen and the characteristic wing patterns used for species identification (Photo Credit: Ed T. Schmidtman, USDA/ARS)

Non-biting gnats are also being reported; oftentimes seen in large numbers in swarms. These are most likely fungus gnats that will breed in decomposing vegetation/plant material. With receding floodwaters there are extensive habitats suitable for these gnats to develop in. Other than being a nuisance, these gnats cause no harm. As flooded areas continue to dry up populations of these small gnats will decline.



Adult black fly (Photo Credit: University of California-Davis)

The best defense against biting midges and black flies is to wear light-colored clothing when outdoors and use an EPA registered insect repellent. If possible, avoid outdoor areas at times when peak biting activity is occurring.

More information on biting midges can be obtained in publication "Biting Midges: Biology and Public Health Risk" <<http://extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-250.pdf>> or the Medical Entomology website: <<http://www.entm.purdue.edu/publichealth/insects/bitingmidge.html>>



Fungus gnat adult