Stable Flies Plague People, Pets, and Livestock

Barb Ogg
UNL Extension Educator

The stable fly is a nuisance fly which inflicts painful bites to feed on blood. It can be found in rural, urban, and suburban areas wherever breeding sites are found. With all the rain this year, moist breeding sites in both rural and urban areas are abundant.


Leon Higley, UNL Entomology
Stable flies have stilleto-shaped mouthparts.

Stable flies look superficially like house flies, but with an important difference ... they have a bayonet-like mouthpart used to suck blood. They bite and are also popularly referred to as "biting house flies" and "dog flies." Stable flies can be a serious problem for dogs kenneled outdoors.

Because of its name, many people probably think the best place to find a stable fly is in a stable, but they are hardly ever found there. In rural areas, eggs are deposited in wet, organic materials such as straw, litter, manure mixed with straw or other bedding, soggy hay, waste silage or feed in feedlots. In urban areas, stable flies will breed in wet piles of grass clippings, vegetable or fruit matter, or compost heaps. Many experts believe the biggest source of stable flies in municipalities is dog feces.


Jim Kalisch, UNL Entomology
Comparison of Stable Fly (left) and House Fly (right).

Eggs hatch in one to three days into tiny maggots which begin to feed. The last stage maggots often crawl away from the breeding site and pupate in the soil. Pupae are chestnut brown and have a seed-like appearance.

Total development from egg to adult fly takes three to four weeks, depending on temperature.

Unlike mosquitoes, both male and female stable flies bite. Stable flies are active during the daytime. They bite standing animals, including people, on the legs and ankles. They bite resting dogs on the ears. Stable flies need two to five minutes to complete a blood meal, which is often interrupted. They may "bite" several times to obtain the blood needed.

Control

Eliminate breeding sites:

- It seems too simple, but scattering breeding material regularly to dry it out is the most effective method of control. This will deny the fly maggots a moist breeding site.
- Turn piles of compost to encourage rapid decomposition.
- Do not dump lawn clippings in piles after mowing.
- Clean up after pets, remove pet waste twice a week to prevent fly development. Put feces in plastic bags and in the trash.

Chemicals: The use of pesticides is usually *not* the best means of managing filth fly, but there are situations where it may be helpful.

- Residual insecticides can be applied to outdoor surfaces where flies rest, such as the outside surfaces of barns, stables, doghouses, and fences. Note: stable flies are most attracted to surfaces painted white.
- Advantix® (Bayer HealthCare), is a product tested on dogs against stable flies. After about four weeks of use, it has been shown to repel stable flies. This product also protects dogs against mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas.
- People may be able to get some repellency against stable flies by using repellents containing DEET and picaridin. Spray lower legs where stable flies are likely to feed. You may need to use products with higher percentages of active ingredients.

Other suggestions: Wear long pants and socks will help prevent stable fly bites. Dave Keith, former UNL extension entomologist, suggested when you wear shorts you should wear dark colored socks (rather than white ones).

Mothballs are Pesticides — Use Safely

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Mothballs and moth crystals are used to prevent damage to clothing from carpet beetles and clothes moths. These products contain either napthalene or paradichlorobenzene (PBD).

At room temperature, these active ingredients are mild fumigants, which means they produce a gas which may be somewhat toxic to fabric pests.

Of the two, PDB is more toxic to insects, but PDB can also damage plastics, including plastic storage boxes and plastic buttons. The damage can occur from direct contact or from vapors. Napthalene does not damage plastics, but will corrode metal. In moist conditions, napthalene may also discolor fabrics. Information on the label will provide precautions and proper usage of the product.

Mothballs and crystals are considered to be pesticides. As pesticidal products, they have an EPA registration number and must be used according to the directions on the label. Use restrictions on the product label include:

- Only use to control clothes moths and carpet beetles.
- Only use in clean, tight-fitting containers.
- Do not use in containers that allow vapors to escape into occupied rooms.

For some inexplicable reason, some unthinking people believe moth balls and crystals will repel other animals. Mothballs cannot be used:

- in attics to get rid of bats, squirrels, raccoons, and other animals,
- in perennial beds and gardens to prevent rabbit feeding,
- in yards or basements to get rid of snakes.

Mothballs will not be effective for these off-label uses. It is also a violation of Federal Law to use this product in a manner inconsistent with its labeling.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture Pesticide Program regulates pesticide applications, including the inappropriate use of mothballs. At least one Lincolnite was observed recently picking up mothballs he had earlier spread to get rid of snakes in his yard.

Wildlife Resources Available from UNL

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension has new and updated publications to help you resolve wildlife problems. These publications can be picked up at the extension office or can be found on the Web at *http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/*.

Urban Pest Birds: Controlling Damage

This new publication focuses the characteristics, habits, and management of house sparrows, starlings, and pigeons. These three birds are invasive, non-native species in Nebraska. They are not covered by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. This means you are free to control these three bird species using methods described in this publication.

Before starting any type of control, make sure you correctly identify the birds. Photos are included in this publication to help you identify the birds:

Invasive **House Sparrows**


Stephen M. Vantassel
House Sparrow, male


Erin Bauer
Pigeon

red-winged black bird, yellow-headed black bird.

Remember, only the house sparrow, pigeons, starlings are not protected. All other species are protected and considered beneficial. Refer to the publication for help with identification or contact your local extension office. A local pest control professional can also help you with problem birds.

Feral Cats and Their Management

Feral cats are domestic cats gone wild. These cats cause significant losses to populations of beneficial native birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. They can transmit several diseases including rabies and toxoplasmosis, and become general nuisances in both rural and urban settings. This new NebGuide describes how you can use an integrated pest management (IMP) approach to help control feral cat populations.

Household Hazardous Waste Collections

These collections are for households only; not for businesses. Only residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County can bring items to collections.

SOME ITEMS YOU CAN BRING FOR DISPOSAL: Thermometers, thermostats containing mercury, solvents, oil-based paint, paint thinner, stripper and stain, old gasoline, transmission fluid, pesticides, (even banned products like DDT), items containing PCB's (ballasts from fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances). These collections are a good place to dispose of compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL's), which contain mercury.

DO NOT bring asbestos, tires, batteries, used oil, antifreeze, medicines, fertilizers, explosives and ammunition.

For more information, call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at (402) 441-8040.

Friday, Aug. 27 • 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
By appointment only, call 441-8084

Saturday, Aug. 28 • 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Veyance Tech, 4021 North 56 Street

Saturday, Sept. 18 • 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
Lincoln Industries, 600 West E Street

Friday, Oct. 22 • 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
By appointment only, call 441-8084

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