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## Profile

# Lovebugs

*Plecia nearctica*

Lovebugs are small black flies with red thoraxes. Males are 1/4 inch, and females are 1/3 inch in length. These flies are members of the family, *Bibionidae* which are known as March flies.

Although several species of March flies are native to Florida, Lovebugs are recent invaders from the south that emigrated from Central America into Texas, moved east up the Gulf Coast, and eventually arrived in Florida in the 1940's.

Lovebugs are in the process of mating when they swarm over the roads, so there are either two individuals linked together in the air or a single insect looking for another: the large one is the female and the small one is the male. The female usually gets her way and she drags the male around with her.

Two flights of Lovebugs occur each year. The spring flight occurs during late April and May. A second flight occurs during late August and September. Flights extend over periods of 4 to 5 weeks. Mating takes place almost immediately after emergence of the females. Adult females live only 2-3 days.

Female Lovebugs lay from 100 to 350 eggs which are deposited on the ground beneath decaying vegetation.

Larvae feed on decaying plant material and live on the soil surface just beneath the decaying organic matter. Larvae perform a beneficial function by converting the plant material into organic components which can again be used by the growing plants.

After larvae mature, they transform into pupae. The pupal stage requires



Lovebug flights have been substantially reduced in North Central Florida. This reduction in the population is partly attributed to predators. Larvae aggregate in extremely high numbers in pastures and other grassy habitats which makes them vulnerable to foraging birds. Lovebug larvae have been found in the gizzards of robins and quail.

Laboratory studies using invertebrate predators found in lovebug infested pastures that earwigs, two species of beetle larvae, and centipedes were voracious predators too.

There are no species-specific chemical treatments for Lovebugs. Any treatment for larva or for adults would kill many more beneficial insects. The most effective human method of eliminating adult Lovebugs is with a car or truck.



about 7 to 10 days before the adults emerge.

Lovebugs are found in denser populations in the middle of the state where pastures provide an abundance of decaying organic matter good for larva reproduction. The larvae also consume the organic matter to survive.

Adult Lovebugs are harmless and do not sting or bite. They feed on the nectar of various plants, especially Sweet Clover, Goldenrod and Brazilian Pepper. Usually, Lovebug flights are restricted to daylight hours at temperatures above 68°F, reaching peak activity around 10 a.m.; they stop flying at dusk. At night lovebugs rest on low growing vegetation.

During the past several years, both the April-May and August-September

Lovebugs are harmless except to car finishes. Spattered Lovebugs left on a car and exposed to sunlight will turn acidic in 24 hours, which can damage paint.

There are several things that can be done to lessen the problem facing motorists.

By traveling at night motorists can avoid the insects. Traveling at slower speeds during the day will reduce, but not eliminate, the number of bugs that will be spattered.

A large screen placed in the front of the grill will keep the radiator fins from clogging and will protect the finish on the front of the car. If a large screen is not used in front of the grill, at least place a small screen behind the grill in front of the radiator.