

Profile

Yellow Fly

Diachlorus ferrugatus

The family Tabanidae, commonly known as horse flies and deer flies, contains pests of cattle, horses and humans. Horse flies are in the genus *Tabanus*; deer flies are in the genus *Chrysops*.

In Florida, the name “yellow fly” is commonly used to describe a group of about a dozen different yellow-bodied biting flies in the Tabanidae family.

However, Florida tabanid experts recognize only one species, *Diachlorus ferrugatus*, as the “true” Yellow Fly.

The Yellow Fly is the fierce biter in Florida and the one in Corkscrew. Like mosquitoes, it is the female fly that is responsible for inflicting a bite. The males are mainly pollen and nectar feeders.

The female Yellow Fly attacks man vigorously, and the bites usually are painful, causing large and persistently itching swellings in many people. Although it attacks throughout the day, it is most active during the late afternoon and on cloudy days. Activity decreases on cool or windy days.

The Yellow Fly is especially common near large bodies of water, but it tends to remain in or near forests, seldom attacking in numbers far from the shelter of trees.

It is also one of the few tabanids which attacks indoors.

All exposed parts of the victim’s body may be attacked, and since the flight is rather quiet, a person is not aware of the fly until the sharp pain of the bite is felt.

The fly’s preference for shade makes it less of a pest to cattle and horses in open pastures. Deer Flies attack livestock as well as humans, and Horse Flies almost exclusively attack livestock and leave humans alone.

Yellow Flies are on the wing in Florida from March to November, al-



Males are rarely seen. Mating takes place soon after emergence. Once mated, the female deposits an egg mass over water or wet ground favorable to the development of larvae.

Eggs are laid in masses ranging from 100 to 1000 eggs and are laid in layers on a vertical surface such as overhanging foliage, sticks, and aquatic vegetation. Aquatic vegetation is most preferred.

Egg masses are deposited throughout the life cycle of the female.

Yellow Fly eggs are very small, about 1/16" long, and creamy white when first deposited, but they turn dark after several hours. These egg masses sometimes resemble tar specks.

Eggs hatch in five to seven days, depending upon ambient weather conditions, and the larvae fall to the moist soil and water below. There they burrow into mud or moist earth and begin feeding on organic debris or preying on other small aquatic organisms.

The larvae may molt more than 10 times before pupating and emerging as adults. Mature larvae have been found only in deeply shaded areas in root mats of cypress and other woody plants, always beneath the water surface.

Depending upon the climatic region, there are one or two generations per year. Winter is generally passed in the larval stage, after which the larvae will migrate to drier soil and develop into a pupa.

The pupa is a nonfeeding, resting stage that develops into the adult fly. Generally, the life cycle from egg to adult is about one year.

Yellow Flies are visual as well as odor hunters, so a repellent containing DEET may deter them somewhat, but it will not stop them. The best protection is to wear long sleeves and long pants during the flies’ peak season.

though the peak season is April through June.

The adult, *above left*, is a predominantly yellow fly about 3/8 inch long, a little smaller but similar in appearance to a deer fly, *above right*.

The Yellow Fly’s wings are clear with a prominent brown patch at the apex. The eyes are brilliant green with two semicircular purple bands.

The female can be distinguished from deer flies by the very narrow space between the eyes in front. In both Yellow Fly sexes the brown wing patch is at the apex rather than across the middle of the wing as with the Deer Fly.

Female flies are vicious, painful biters. They cut through the skin with their knife-like mouthparts and suck the blood for several minutes.

When they fly away, a drop or two of blood may exude from the wound, permitting secondary feeding sites for other nuisance insects.

The itching and swelling from bites are allergic reactions to hemorrhagic saliva poured into the wound to prevent clotting while the fly is feeding. A person can become increasingly sensitive to repeated bites.

Although strong fliers, adults usually are not found far from the larval habitat. However, females may move distances to find a blood meal, which they need for their eggs to develop.

Both sexes feed on plant nectar and pollen to obtain energy.