

Floodwater mosquitoes creating problems

By LARRY MITCHELL-Staff Writer

Posted: 11/06/2012 12:00:00 AM PST

OROVILLE — For the last few months, Butte County's mosquito fighters have worked to prevent the spread of West Nile virus.

With that threat reduced, staff of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District have found a new problem on their hands: the floodwater mosquito.

These aggressive mosquitoes have been flying into the communities of Gridley and Honcut and biting people, said Matt Ball, the district's manager.

That's why the district plans to spray pesticides from 7:30 to 10 a.m. this morning in the Gridley and East Gridley areas.

The good thing about the floodwater mosquito is that it's not likely to make anyone sick, Ball said. It's more a nuisance than anything else.

And it can be a big nuisance, he added. "They come at you and will bite you through your pantlegs. There are so many in certain areas you can hardly get out of your pickup."

Normally floodwater mosquitoes (*Aedes melanimon*) aren't much of a problem.

They breed on land that is flooded in late summer and early fall to create wetland habitat for migrating water birds, he said.

The Butte County district has sprayed about 10,000 acres of these wetlands to get rid of the mosquitoes.

However, Ball said, some wetlands were probably missed. Also, some nearby mosquito abatement districts can't afford to spray wetlands. He speculated that some of the floodwater mosquitoes are coming into Butte County from those wetlands.

Normally, these mosquitoes wouldn't bother many people at this time of year because they couldn't fly far from the wetlands, he said. The mosquitoes' flying range depends on the air temperature. The insects don't fly when it's cold.

But lately, the unusually warm weather has given these mosquitoes more time to fly, he said. As a result, they are able to go from the wetlands all the way into certain communities.

With today's fogging, he said, "We're going to try to knock them down for the folks in Gridley."

The fogging today is the first in a community since Oct. 16, when another operation aimed at floodwater mosquitoes was carried out, Ball said.

Lower temperatures are expected later this week, which should take care of the problem, at least for the time being, he said.

As for West Nile virus, it's just a minimal problem at this point, he added. That's because it's cooler, compared to summer, and the virus needs hot weather to be very active.

Mosquitoes pick up West Nile virus when they bite infected birds. When the weather is hot, the virus in a bird becomes very active, Ball said. Then a mosquito that bites the bird will likely pick up the virus.

When the weather is cooler and the virus less active, transmission of the virus from bird to mosquito is much less likely.

Floodwater mosquitoes can carry West Nile and some other viruses, but they aren't very efficient at transmitting the virus to people, he said.

Staff writer Larry Mitchell can be reached at 896-7759, lmitchell@chicoer.com, or followed on Twitter @LarryMitchell7.