

# Mosquitoes abound now in north valley

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer  
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A Western malaria mosquito.(From the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District's... OROVILLE -- On warm days like we've had earlier this month, the Western malaria mosquito comes out looking for victims aggressively.

The Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District has gotten many complaints, but there's not much it can do.

The mosquito known formally as anopheles freeborni is abundant in the north valley right now, especially in the cities, said Matt Ball, manager of the district.

"We deal with this every single spring and late winter," he said in a phone interview Monday.

These mosquitoes, which typically start attracting the public's attention in February, don't carry West Nile virus, Ball said. And while they can spread malaria very effectively, there hasn't been any of that in the north valley for decades.

The warm, sunny weather of the last few weeks, has made Western malaria mosquitoes very active, Ball said. As long as it's cooler and rainy, as it was on Monday, they won't be seen.

These mosquitoes are plentiful in areas where there are rice fields.

The mosquitoes appearing now in the towns and cities began life in the rice fields last summer or fall, he said. They prefer clear, clean water, and rice fields have plenty of that.

In September and October, they migrate from the rice fields to the cities.

They are capable of flying at altitudes of 200 to 2,000 feet, he said, and they are attracted by bright lights, so they're likely to head for Oroville or Chico. Some make it out of the valley to Paradise.

The female mosquitoes are looking for the "blood meals" they get by biting people or animals, he said.

They're also good at surviving the winter in a "state of diapause," something like hibernation, he said. They take shelter on the eaves of homes, in tool sheds, firewood stacks, culverts and pipes and anywhere else they can stay warm.

Then, when the temperature rises, to around 62 degrees, the mosquitoes' metabolism speeds up, and they start flying again, looking for a meal. It's only the females that do the biting (the males live on nectar). The females need the protein and other nutrients in blood to develop their eggs.

"They need one blood meal to be able to lay 100 to 400 eggs," he said. After depositing the eggs in standing water, they look for another meal. They can lay two to four "broods of eggs" during their lifetime, which last six to nine months.

In the spring, the mosquitoes lay eggs in pools of water in and near the cities. But once the weather in the valley starts staying warm, these small pools of water become stagnant — not what the insects like. Then they fly back to the rice fields where clear water is plentiful, he said.

At this time of year, the district gets lots of calls from people who want the mosquito problem taken care of, Ball said. Unfortunately, there's not much that can be done.

These days, the Western malaria mosquito is only out flying for a few hours in the middle of the day, he said. Weather conditions aren't usually right for spraying pesticides then, and also pollinators, such as bees, flies and ladybugs, are out at the same time, and spraying would kill them along with the mosquitoes.

In addition, the sunshine tends to break down the droplets of pesticide, making the spray less effective, he said.

The situation is quite different when the problem is mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus.

Then, spraying to kill adult mosquitoes is done during the evenings, when those mosquitoes are most active.

When the district gets complaints about the Western malaria mosquito, a staff member will go out and make sure residents don't have places on their property where the mosquitoes can breed.

It's frustrating not to be able to do more than that when these complaints come in, Ball said.

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