

Late summer, early fall prime time for mosquitoes

By **ERIC AVEDESIAN**
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CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE - They're called skeeters, bloodsuckers and New Jersey's unofficial state bird, but despite efforts to repel mosquitoes with netting and bug repellent, these insects still torment boaters and fishermen along the back bays and marshes.

For those scratching, swatting and spraying, the Cape May County Department of Mosquito Control is here to help.

The department began as the Cape May County Mosquito Commission in 1915. The current buildings used by the commission at one time housed Civilian Conservation Corps workers during the 1930s and German prisoners of war during World War II. In 2005 the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders abolished the commission and made mosquito control its own department of county government.

Dr. Peter Bosak, superintendent of the Cape May County Department of Mosquito Control, said the department's mission is to prevent the county's mosquito population from increasing.

"We try to control mosquitoes. Our mantra is not to eliminate them. That's not what we're here for. We're simply here to reduce the numbers in the most economical and ecological way possible," Bosak said.

Bosak said while mosquito bites can cause irritation and itching, there are those who are allergic to them.

"Everyone reacts differently to a mosquito bite. Some people barely feel them, some people get large welts and sometimes they can become infected," Bosak said.

A vibrant, thriving mosquito population means more chance for certain diseases, transmitted by the mosquitoes to humans.

While malaria has been eradicated in the United States thanks to vigilant mosquito control, Bosak said the disease can still be reintroduced because the mosquito responsible for transmitting the disease still exists.

In Cape May County, the Department of Mosquito Control primarily monitors Eastern equine encephalitis or (EEE) and West Nile virus, two diseases mosquitoes can spread.

According to the department's website, Eastern equine encephalitis once an epidemic in 1959, now rarely impacts humans. West Nile Virus was first isolated in North America in 1999 and spread rapidly, nearly covering the continent.

While most infected with the West Nile Virus recover, those most likely to succumb include the elderly and those with suppressed immune systems. Both West Nile Virus and Eastern equine encephalitis can affect animals.

The department's 13 full-time and eight seasonal employees work in tandem to locate and reduce the prevalence of mosquitoes via water management, spraying larvae, and spraying adult mosquitoes.

"The one thing that's true that applies to mosquitoes is that they start in water," Bosak noted. "All mosquitoes need to have water in which to grow. If there's a way to manipulate the water, then we can avoid using any sort of pesticides. Once we eliminate that water we don't have to worry about mosquitoes."

The department digs drainage ditches and works to reduce standing water, where mosquitoes lay their eggs.

When water management is not an option, the department focuses on the mosquito larvae.

"We try to use chemicals that are environmentally friendly," Bosak said. "One of the major chemicals that we use is called Bti (Bacillus thuringiensis subsp. israelensis), a bacterial insecticide. We use mostly that material for controlling mosquito larvae."

Bosak said the department sprays mosquitoes by truck in certain areas, using trap data and phone calls or service requests from citizens.

For adult mosquitoes, the department uses the following aerial insecticides: Aqua Reslin, trade name for permethrin, and/or Aqua Anvil/Anvil 10+10, trade names for prallethrin and sumithrin, and/or Zenivex/AquaZenivex, trade names for etofenprox, applied in low volume aerosols.

"After 100 years we've come to know the county pretty well. We know the terrain," Bosak said, adding on a recent surveying assignment via helicopter, he spied dredge spoils that could be a mosquito habitat.

"I was looking at some of the dredge spoils up near Ocean City that will produce mosquitoes. What we do is we larvicide those area so that they don't produce adult

mosquitoes," Bosak said.

Inspectors from the department work throughout the county five days a week from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. and survey areas for mosquito activity. They spray around storm drains, marsh areas and standing water.

The inspectors also take samples of the larvae and examine them.

"They have ways of trapping mosquito larvae. Those mosquito larvae are brought back to our laboratory and identified. Those mosquitoes that we know are a problem either in terms of nuisance or in terms of disease are treated for," Bosak said.

Mosquito season starts in the early in the year, Bosak said, but the mosquitoes present in early spring don't present a problem for humans and are located in the wild parts of Cape May County.

Bosak said actual mosquito season is June 1 until the end of October. He said late summer and early fall is a critical time for the mosquito population because of disease transmission.

"These particular diseases tend to build up over time," Bosak said. "We don't see them early in the season, but we start to see them as the season progresses and come the end of summer and early fall. That's when we really see the numbers of cases in mosquitoes that we want to keep an eye on so people don't get sick."

Bosak noted though there are 63 different mosquito species in New Jersey, Cape

May County is home to 45 of them.

"We have to know the biology and ecology of ever single one of those species in order to monitor them and control them. These inspectors are out there, they're collecting them, they're looking at what stage they're in and they're determining how to control them," Bosak said. "There's a lot of science behind it. It's not just a matter of spraying a chemical. There's a lot of thought that goes behind it."

Analyzing mosquito population data is helpful for understanding where mosquitoes breed and thrive.

"We like to pinpoint our spraying so that it reflects the mosquito numbers. We just don't go out and spray every Tuesday night in Ocean City, for instance. That's not the way it works. It works based on trap counts and citizens requests."

Bosak said if the department receives an abundance of calls from one certain area, they would investigate, notice the mosquito population was significant, and schedule a spraying.

According to Bosak, the mosquito population in Cape May County is "running for about average" for this time of year.

"We have right now a total of three West Nile Virus positive collections of mosquitoes and they are all from Lower Township," Bosak said.

Bosak's advice for people to avoid mosquito bites is personal mosquito repel-

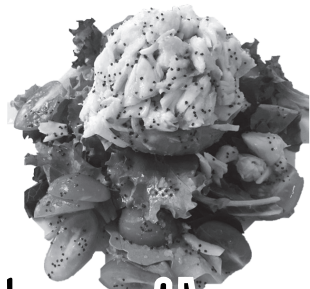
lant, a number of which are commercially available. Of these, the Centers for Disease Control recommends DEET (diethyltoluamide), one of the most common insect repellants. Bosak said he uses picaridin, an insect repellent

that doesn't last as long as DEET, but doesn't have the odor DEET has.

Bosak also recommends limiting outdoor activities to the daytime, since mosquitoes usually are active around dawn and dusk.

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