

Researcher says mosquitos, larger than a dime and packing a painful bite, could invade soon

April 5 2013, by Katy Hennig

With plenty of news reports talking about giant mosquitos invading Florida, Deby Cassill, a biologist at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, said it's just a matter of time before the "gallinipper" or flying, "hairy legged-zebra" take the stage.

"So we've got this huge potential with all of these eggs that were laid during Tropical Storm Debbie, the next storm coming in that wets that surface, we're going to have a huge [population explosion](#) of this giant mosquito," said Cassill.

The American Giant Mosquito or *Psorophora ciliata* are known as floodwater mosquitoes because they lay their eggs in low-lying areas with damp soil and grassy overgrowth. When these areas flood following a [dry period](#), large numbers of adult mosquitoes will hatch.

They have been around for centuries and are notorious for inflicting a painful bite. It is only the females that attack. And they do it during both the day and night – in stark contrast to the typical dusk and dawn flights of smaller species of mosquitoes.

According to Cassill, the animal originates near the area of the [Mississippi river](#) delta and with heavy rains during previous [tropical storms](#), migrated over to Florida.

"They've been called the hairy-legged zebra of the mosquito world and I think that they are not as big as a quarter. But their legs are long enough and their bodies are long enough to span a dime and in the mosquito world, that's a big animal, kind of like a dinosaur or a large vampire floating around and going after us."

The bite from these mosquitos feels more intense then that of the smaller types because the giants have saw-like mouthparts that inject saliva and create intense pain when extracting the jaw after the bite.

Cassill said the critters do not carry disease, but they consume the larvae of other types of disease-carrying mosquitos. And, they don't move around that fast.

"What they go after actually is they have carbon dioxide or CO₂ detectors and when they smell the breath of humans or the breath of cattle or the breath of live stock, that is one of the long distance detectors. When they are close enough, they use their vision. Then after that they have little heat detectors and they'll go for the warm spots along the throat, behind the knees, sometimes behind the neck and zero in and poke that long jaw into our bodies."

According to Cassill, the best protection from the American Giant Mosquito is an old technology.

"I think just be aware of it, have your fly swatter or mosquito swatter. I mean somebody ought to have a giant mosquito swatter in place by then."

Ultimately, they are among certain pests that we may just have to coexist with, she said, if we want to live in Florida.

"Other than that there is not much we can do. There is no way that we

can rid ourselves of all pests. Part of it is we live in paradise, there is a small cost and the American Giant Mosquito may be that cost, for a short time. "

Provided by University of South Florida

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