Mosquito

Of the 4,000 or so known species of mosquitoes world-wide, some transmit deadly diseases, such as malaria, dengue and encephalitis. Others are simply irritating biting insects that need blood to develop their eggs. Most do not bite humans, preferring rodents, cattle, birds and even frogs. The common house mosquito (Culex pipiens) is the species that transmits West Nile virus in the United States.

Larvae are found in marshes, shallow ditches in grassy areas, and sometimes in rooted ivy in trees or in small artificial containers. As adults, both sexes feed on sugar from plant sap or flowers. Only the female takes blood, to nourish her eggs. Mosquitoes in northern North America can produce anti-freeze proteins that allow the eggs (in Aedes mosquitoes) or adults (in Culex and Anopheles) to survive winter and become active again the following spring. The life expectancy of active adult mosquitoes is one to three weeks.

The female has tiny blade-like mouthparts that puncture the skin and that allow her to consume two or three times her body weight. This blood-sucking can last as long as 90 seconds, but often takes less than 10 seconds. The female mosquito finds a secluded resting place to digest her huge meal. For the next three to four days she will convert blood protein into egg protein before depositing her eggs.