

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Mosquitoes

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

This summer's West Nile virus numbers are up. What better time to take a closer look at the vector for this disease – mosquitoes.

To date more than 3,500 species of mosquitoes have been described. Some are harmless, some are beneficial in that they feed on harmful mosquitoes, and of course, some are vectors for some of the most persistent and devastating human diseases, leading some to declare that mosquitoes are the most dangerous animals on earth.

It is the females that feed on blood, using the proteins to form eggs. Getting blood is so important, the female digestive tract is designed to take advantage of blood whenever it becomes available. The mosquito's food, such as flower nectar doesn't go straight to its stomach, rather is stored in a side pouch, and released when needed. This leaves the stomach ready to take blood whenever the opportunity arises. Once the blood feeding begins, mosquitos can actually secrete unneeded liquid portions of the blood as they feed, helping ensure an ample supply of proteins.

Three out of the four stages of a mosquito's life are aquatic and in order to help control mosquitoes, the rule of thumb is eliminate standing water around the home. As aquatic insects, they're prey to predators like dragonfly larvae. But these young mosquitoes are also incredibly tolerant of pollution, which means when streams and ponds and lakes turn dirty, mosquitoes survive while their predators die off.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.