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'They are everywhere'



'They are everywhere'. Virgil Nose holds up several three-day old fly strips which have little vacancy. AMANDA MOORE/STAFF PHOTO

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Most people look forward to the end of the workday. But lately, it's a time that Virgil Nose has come to dread.

He dreads going to his Beamsville home, where instead of enjoying the few months of summer we have in Ontario, he is shuttered up indoors with a fly swatter.

"We have flies on the fence, the hot tub, the swings, the patio, the furniture, the walls. You kick a bush and a swarm of flies comes out," said Nose, who lives in a century-old home on Mountain Street. "They are in our house, our garage, our cars. They are everywhere."

This is the second straight summer the Noses have had to deal with swarms of pesky house flies and Nose is now considering selling the house.

"No one sits outside in our neighbourhood. You can't," he said. "They land on your head, arms, legs, back. They are everywhere. We can't enjoy our backyard at all. Our quality of life is absolutely diminished."

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs employees have been monitoring the situation and are encouraged with the results they are seeing.

"We're actually more active than we were last year at this time," said Hugh Fraser, an agricultural engineer with OMAFRA. Fraser said the ministry is monitoring a Beamsville farm, that is not on Mountain Street, to find trends in fly numbers. He said so

far, staff have actually seen less fly activity than this time last year, but that's doesn't mean numbers are down. "The flies appear, at this time, to be less than last year, which is a good thing. That doesn't mean there are no flies, it means we are encouraged with the results. We're not seeing large numbers at the places we are monitoring."

Fraser, who notes he is no fly expert, said all house flies need to thrive are a food and water source and a nice place to lay their eggs and pupate.

"They can live and eat in any source of organic waste," said Fraser. "Some people think the flies commute and go from a barn to their home and return at night. Once they are at a place they might not leave if it is a nice place to live."

Fraser also noted complaints are not isolated to Beamsville. His team is also looking at the Kimbo Road area in Smithville, and he said colleagues across the province are reporting similar incidents. One possible reason for the influx, said Fraser, is the weather.

"We barely had a winter, which is not good," he said. "Global warming, whether you believe in it or not, I do, is going to affect all kinds of insects, not just flies. It is going to have a bearing on all different things."

Another contributing factor, said Fraser, could be the pesticide ban, which Ontario introduced in 2009. Fraser said pest control products are less effective and less available than they previously were.

But a duck farm down the street from Nose's house is not likely the culprit, said Fraser, describing the operation as "very well operated." He said fly numbers at that farm are less than last year.

Fraser has also visited poultry farmers in Smithville and has found similar results, with one operation having "just about none." That farm, explained Fraser, has implemented a form of biocontrol that is also being utilized at the duck farm. The farmers are using wasps, smaller than fruit flies, to control the flies. The wasps sting the pupae of the house flies and deposit their own eggs, the eggs being to grow and feed on the developing fly preventing it from hatching.

That is little comfort to Luke Harris, who lives three doors down from Nose. Harris reported similar observations as Nose, calling the situation "horrible, absolutely horrible."

"How would you like to live with this every day," he asked, noting he has heard similar complaints from friends across Beamsville about the increase in fly activity. "We just want some relief."

As part of his investigation, Fraser looked to historical records for clues about house flies but found it has been a recurring battle.

"This is not a new issue," Fraser said.

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