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Gang of fierce Asian mosquitoes zeroes in on N.J.

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BY JIM NORMAN

STAFF WRITER

THE RECORD

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The dire warnings of swarms of cicadas are beginning to fade from memory, and most people in North Jersey are starting to get over what might be called insect fatigue.

But just when you thought it was safe to attend your next summer barbecue, know this: There is a new scourge in town. It's the Asian tiger mosquito, an elegant little bug that looks like it's dressed for an evening out, but will eat you alive, figuratively speaking, even at midday.

Before this new gang showed up, New Jerseyans had learned to live with, if not exactly love, several species of drably-clad plain brown mosquitoes that had collectively earned the title of New Jersey State Bird in late-night talk-show monologues.

Those other mosquitoes, like the ubiquitous Vexan mosquito, were predictable. They came out at dusk, sucked your blood for a while, made it impossible to get to sleep with their infernal whine, and sometimes gave you a fleeting moment of intense, murderous pleasure when you squished one in mid-bite — and then generally left you alone until the next evening.

The Asian tiger mosquito, named for its distinctive black-and-white striped legs and body markings, has no compunction about attacking when you least expect it, zooming in for a meal as you get into the car for your morning commute, for example.

The mosquito, known more properly as *Aedes albopictus* — or "albo" to the people charged with tracking and fighting it — was first discovered in New Jersey in Monmouth County in 1995 and has spread far to the north since then. It is a major nuisance in Bergen and Passaic counties, according to the mosquito-control agencies in both places.

"The Asian tiger mosquito is an extremely aggressive insect that has largely supplanted *japonicus* since 2008, especially in urban and suburban areas," said Eric Green, the



The blood-sucking Asian tiger mosquito

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mosquito control officer for [Passaic County](#). The japonicus mosquito, he explained, is an insect that feeds primarily on birds and is known to spread disease among its hosts.

The Asian tiger mosquito could be "a more efficient disease vector, especially for West Nile virus," he said, because "it bites in daytime and could put more people at risk."

Pete Rendine, chief inspector with the mosquito control division of the [Bergen County](#) Public Works Department, said Asian tiger mosquitoes "are the worst, nuisance-wise, because they are adapting to our climate. They are here to stay."

"This is an extremely obnoxious nuisance mosquito," said Claudia O'Malley, a biologist for the state's mosquito control division. "It is impossible to control without concerted efforts by homeowners in eliminating the breeding habitat," she said.

Not only is it aggressive, but the Asian tiger mosquito is a known vector for some serious viral diseases around the world, including West Nile virus, dengue fever, eastern equine encephalitis and chikungunya fever, experts say.

Among those diseases, the only ones that are of real concern in northern climates like that of New Jersey are equine encephalitis, which affects horses, and West Nile, which affects people.

Among the 63 different species of mosquito known to exist in New Jersey, relatively few have risen into the ranks of extreme nuisance as has the albopictus, with its preference for daytime hours and human blood. Many breed in remote woodland areas and have very short ranges. One has a decided preference for frogs. One survives exclusively on flower nectar. Another, known as the cannibal mosquito, in its larval stage eats the larvae of other mosquitoes and then grows into an adult that lives on flowers.

Public responsibility

"The thing is, if homeowners would only clean up their property we would not even have an albopictus problem," said Rendine, the [Bergen County](#) chief inspector. Even a discarded bottlecap holds enough water to allow Asian tiger mosquito eggs to hatch into larvae, Rendine said, and a neglected kiddie pool or clogged gutter can turn into a breeding ground and bring misery to an entire neighborhood, he added.

Rendine said he often responds to reports of mosquito swarms only to discover that the source is a carelessly discarded tire or a container of stagnant water teeming with mosquito larvae known as "wrigglers."

"This is how you kill them," Rendine said, spilling a cup filled with water and wrigglers out onto the ground behind his office on Jerome Avenue in [Paramus](#). "That's it. That's all there is to it. Without water, they die."

Rendine said that when he responds to a complaint he sometimes sees that the source of a problem is in a neighboring yard, and if the neighbor refuses to cooperate by eliminating the cause, he has to call the municipal or county health department.

A major source of breeding water, said Green, the [Passaic County](#) control officer, is abandoned swimming pools behind foreclosed homes. "There's nobody to maintain these pools, and the mosquitoes just take over," he said.

"If everybody did their part, this mosquito could be eliminated," Green said.

Warren Staudinger, the assistant chief inspector in [Bergen County](#), agreed.



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"If everyone could be a good neighbor, and if there's an elderly person who physically can't turn over a trash can filled with water, offer to do it for them," he said.

The larvae needs about seven days to develop into flying adults, Staudinger said. Once that happens, the only thing that will kill the creatures is spraying. "Water left standing for more than five days is an open invitation," he said.

For people with backyard ornamental ponds, Rendine has two suggestions: fit the pond with an aerator to keep the water moving, or stock it with a few two-inch fish known as gambusia affinis, or mosquitofish, which eat — you guessed it — mosquito larvae.

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Bonnie Conti Hufnagel New Mosquitos
Reply · 1 · Like June 23 at 7:02am

Suz Protz Top Commenter Fairleigh Dickinson University
Wondering if this bunch got here via shipping freighters. There could have been puddles or objects with standing water and that's how the larvae survived the ride.
There are over 30 varieties of bees in our area; theorized also they got here via shipping freighters.
Reply · Like June 23 at 11:13am

Jim Norman Columbia High School, Maplewood, NJ
Researchers think they arrived in significant numbers in Houston, Texas, in a shipment of used tires in 1985, although a single adult female turned up in a survey trap in Memphis, Tenn., in 1983. By 1986, they were in Jacksonville, Fla., and they've been heading ever northward since then.
Reply · 1 · Like June 23 at 1:06pm

Judy Gilbert Kelvyn Park High School
Just great now we have this crap to deal with and from Asia!
Reply · 2 · Like June 23 at 12:47pm

Michelle Singer Gilbert Retired!!! at United
Time to buy repelant made in China
Reply · Like June 24 at 6:06am

Franklin Marino Top Commenter
Where's ICE when you need them to control illegal immigration?
Reply · Like June 23 at 1:34pm

Beth Stein Northvale, New Jersey
We just took our pool cover off and noticed a whole swarm of what looked like tiny tadpoles swimming in the filter. I wondered what they were. Hoping all the choline tablets and algae killer will take care of it.
Reply · Like June 23 at 6:02pm

Jim Norman Columbia High School, Maplewood, NJ
I don't know about algae killer, but the mosquito control guys told me that mosquito larvae are not bothered by chlorine!
Reply · Like June 23 at 7:13pm

Perry Stein
No worries - they are all dead and with the cover off and water treated/filter running there will be no new ones. From what I saw it was mostly still larva with possibly some that made it to pupa. Hopefully got it before any made it to adults...
Reply · Like June 23 at 8:58pm

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