

Crane flies

It's a bit chilly and raining as I write this, but I know that soon the weather will warm up and the "Texas groundhogs" will be out in force. "Texas groundhogs" is the term I use for crane flies as these typically are the first insects we begin to see emerging in the spring. Like Punxsutawney Phil, crane flies signal that spring is coming soon.

Crane flies can be small to large in size, with some reaching up to an inch (not including their legs). Legs are long and slender legs, and they have a V-shaped suture on the thorax. The spindly legs of crane flies tend to break off very easily, so you may often encounter these insects with less than their allotted amount of 6 legs. Adults sometimes are mistaken for giant mosquitoes and may frighten people.



Crane flies are sometimes called "mosquito hawks" which is a misnomer. The name mosquito hawk is usually used to refer to dragonflies but sometimes is also used to refer to a large species of mosquito that has a larval stage which feeds on other mosquito species. Other incorrect information about crane flies is that they eat mosquitoes, but this is untrue. Adult crane flies feed on nectar or are non-feeding.

Crane fly larvae are found in moist soil where they feed on decaying organic matter. Larvae are wormlike and legless without well-developed heads. Some species of larvae feed on roots of turfgrass or other plants. Crane fly larvae usually do not cause enough damage to be considered a pest, but with very high populations management may be needed.

In Texas, crane flies tend to be abundant in the spring. While adults may be a nuisance when entering homes or disturbing outdoor activities, they do not cause damage and do not bite. Keep doors and windows closed and make sure screens are in good repair. Either turn off outside lights at night or use “bug bulbs” to reduce the number of crane flies that are drawn near the home because of light sources.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at ebrown@ag.tamu.edu.

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