

Crane flies

Crane flies are a conundrum to most people and are often surrounded with misinformation. I find crane flies to be the insect I use to let me know that spring is coming soon.

Crane flies can be small to large insects- topping out at about 1 inch- with long, slender legs and a V-shaped suture on the thorax. Legs tend to break off very easily, so you may often encounter these insects with less than their allotted amount of 6 legs (see image). Adults can be mistaken for giant mosquitoes and may frighten people.

Crane flies are often referred to as “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.

Some people think that crane flies eat mosquitoes, but this is untrue. Adult crane flies feed on nectar or are non-feeding.

Crane fly larvae are found in moist soil feeding on decaying organic matter. The larvae are wormlike and legless without well-developed heads. Some species of the 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 can become abundant in the spring. While the 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 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

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