

WATCH OUT!

Mosquitos Are Coming, Mosquitos Are Coming

BY SUSAN USHER

If you thought the mosquitos were already bad, watch out!

An onslaught of the pestersome insects was due to begin at mid-week and continue for about a week, Rick Hickman, Brunswick County mosquito control supervisor, said Monday.

He and his spraying crew moves into overtime this week in an effort to contain the outbreak through additional spraying. "We're marshalling the full works—five night trucks and two day trucks.

"I'd buy some 6-12 and stay in the house," advised Hickman, warning that the area can expect as many mosquitos as appeared after Hurricane Diana. "Don't turn on a porch light and then go outdoors."

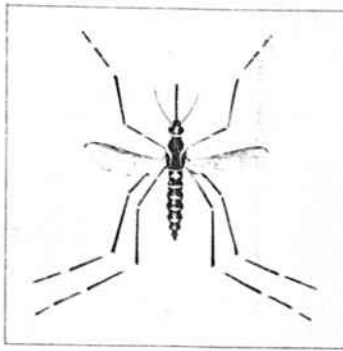
Coincidentally, many of the mosquitos that hatch this week were laid in the days immediately following Diana. It took heavy rainfall and flood-level waters to trigger their hatching.

Hickman measured more than four inches of rain at his Hickman's Crossroads home and said other parts of the county received five to six inches of rain over a period of several days.

Heavy rainfall associated with Hurricane Diana last September raised rivers and creeks to flood levels. As the water level dropped, mosquitos laid series of eggs along the exposed banks, where they've remained dormant until triggered by the first high water since Diana. Each mosquito that had successfully bred laid from 100 to 300 eggs, depending upon the species. Some laid none, others laid eggs two or more times.

"It probably wouldn't amount to anything if it hadn't flooded Sunday night," he added of the expected outbreak. "It's been so dry we probably wouldn't have had the population we're going to have."

But the worst is still to come—with the next six-inch rain, whenever it might occur, said Hickman. "The



next one will be anywhere from one to 10 times greater."

Hickman said all areas of the county, no matter how isolated, will receive at least weekly spraying with Malathion, an insecticide that kills adult mosquitos. When in the area, a truck can be asked to spray around a home.

In addition, Hickman plans daytime spraying along the coastal area, where the species *Aedes sollicitans*, or salt marsh mosquito, causes problems.

"If it were the size of a hummingbird, we'd all be dead," he said of the pesky coastal insects.

"We can get a decent daytime kill with them," Hickman said. Also, in the more heavily populated coastal area, houses are closer together without nearby swamps, making a daytime spraying program even more effective.

"That's where we can deliver the maximum benefit to the largest number of people."

This salt marsh mosquito is just one of 32 types identified in Brunswick County. Hickman's certain another 15 species are present of the 50 found within the state; he just hasn't identified them yet.

Those he has identified range from *Aedes aegypti*, a species that carries the most diseases, to *Psorophora ciliata*, or the "gallinipper," which has a vicious bite and large size. One type, *Wyeomyia haynei*, breeds only in the throat of the pitcher plant, a car-

nivorous plant found locally in the Green Swamp and vicinity.

Because of North Carolina's varied climate, northern and southern species live in Brunswick County.

"We have mosquitos here that also breed in southern Alaska and northern Canada," said Hickman.

Some breed in warm weather, others in cool. Some prefer salt water, others fresh or brackish water. Yet others prefer polluted areas with lots of organic material, such as cess pools.

But they have one thing in common: only the female bites. In most species, egg-laying depends on more than successful breeding with a male. The female must have a blood meal before she can lay eggs. It may take two or more days for her to digest a blood meal, lay her eggs and then go in search of another blood meal before the egg laying begins again. Typically only one mating is required.

Some females bite at night, some during the day; some indoors, some out of doors. A few are absolutely sneaky—they cling to clothing when you go inside after dark, then wait for the coast to clear before striking.

Some prefer human blood to animal, others aren't very choosy.

While some are more vicious than others, they're all pests. When swarms are present, Hickman's office bears the brunt of public complaints.

Mosquito Control

County methods of controlling this year-round mosquito population are environmentally sound, Hickman said. These range from filling or draining potential breeding sites to use of a bacteria to kill mosquitos before they mature.

Hickman said the larvicide is a bacteria that carries a mosquito disease. When larvae eat the spores, the bacteria begin to multiply and destroy their host.

"We didn't put out enough larvicide to cope with this large a

population," he added. "It wouldn't have been cost effective."

In Brunswick County, dredge spoil islands from Eagle Island to the South Carolina line are a major source of mosquitos for the coast.

Eagle Island's 11,03 acres of dredge spoil may be the county's most prolific breeding area, with deep cracks in the drying mud that provide additional surface area for egg deposits.

"You want to know where hell is? It's beneath Eagle Island," said Hickman. Mosquitos from the island infest both Brunswick and New Hanover counties; they cooperate in efforts to reduce its mosquito population—a never-ending battle, by Hickman's account.

On the spoil islands and in some ditches, a "last resort" treatment involves use of an oil thinned with detergent. It is treated with a small amount of diazoxon, a non-organophosphate insecticide, that kills mosquitos that attempt to break through the thin oil slick as it evaporates.

Hickman said he prefers restoring the flow of natural streams to insecticide spraying and channelization projects. But last month the state legislature mandated that 65 percent of all state mosquito control money be used for spraying, not water management through ditching.

In addition to the county's efforts, there are simple techniques for reducing the mosquito population around the house, Hickman said.

The easiest method is to clear out empty containers, from old tires to flower pots and tin cans.

"Anything that holds water, especially around the house, will breed mosquitos," he said. "They don't know how much getting rid of standing water will reduce the mosquito population, especially around their houses," said Hickman.

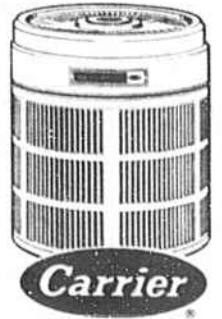
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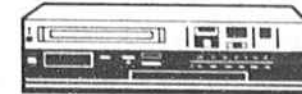
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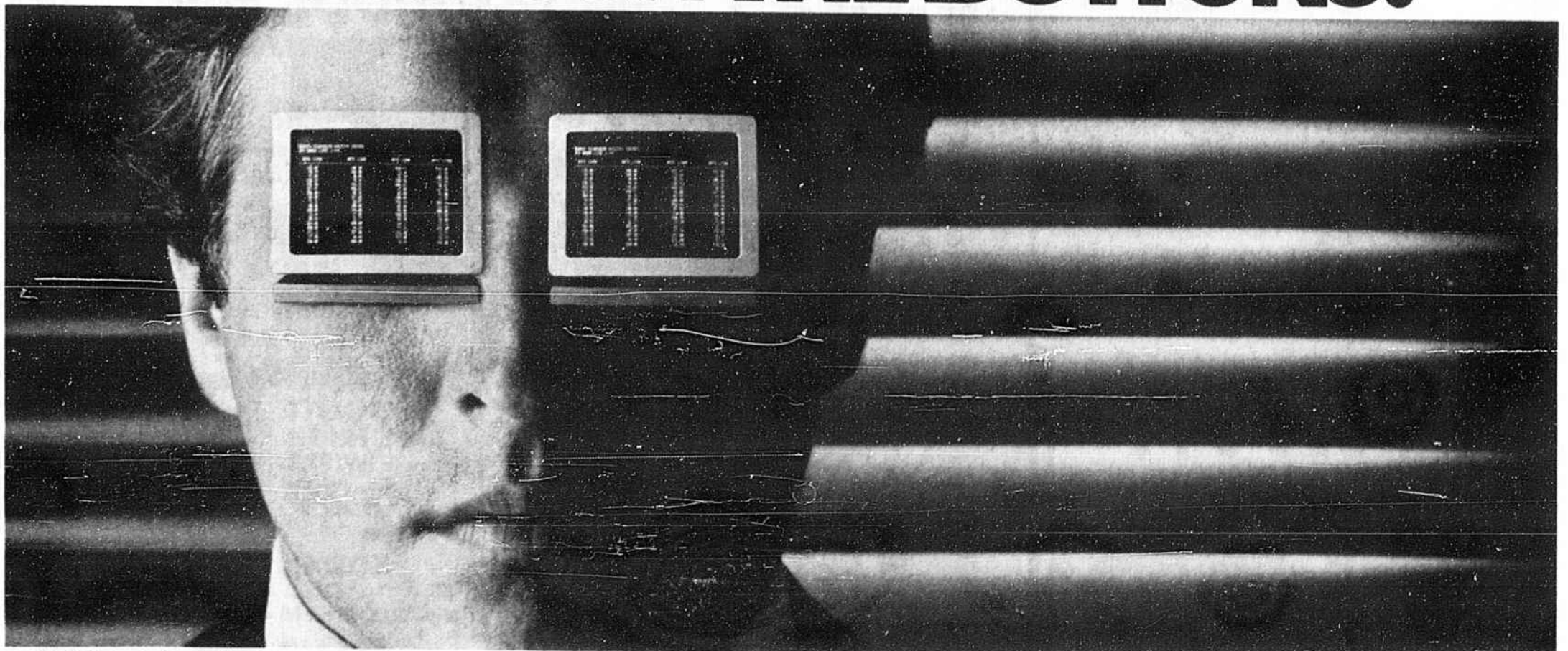


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