

It's shaping up to be a bad year for mosquitoes in Butte County

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer, OrovilleMR.com
Posted: 05/24/2010 09:59:27 PM PDT

OROVILLE -- Although not many mosquitoes have appeared yet in the north valley, this year has the makings of a bad season, said Matt Ball, manager of the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

One reason is that late rains have left lots of water standing all over the area, from the valley to the foothills. A great deal of mosquitoes in their larval form (immature stage) have been found in the water, Ball said. When warm weather hits, adult mosquitoes will appear all over at once and so will complaints from around the county, he predicted.

Another bad sign is that a large number of "green" (not maintained) swimming pools and other sources of water have been found in cities throughout the district. These, too, are ideal breeding grounds for the 25 species of mosquitoes that are found in Butte County.

A big concern with mosquitoes in recent years has been their carrying West Nile virus. Ball said it's impossible to predict how prevalent that disease will be this year.

Mother Nature has been a boon and a bane to mosquito control this year, he said. The plentiful rain has provided lots of breeding habitat, but also, the cool weather has slowed down the process by which mosquitoes turn from larva into adults.

That gives the district's staff more time to control the insects while they're in the larval form and are easier to manage.

"One of our goals is to eliminate as many mosquitoes as possible before they get on the wing," he said.

In late April, the district had helicopters up over Butte County searching for swimming pools that hadn't been maintained and other sources of stagnant water.

The number of sources found was almost double what's typically discovered, Ball said.

Since then, staff from the District have been visiting the owners of these pools and other water sources, asking them to eliminate the problem.

Most people have been very cooperative, he said.

The district has several lines of defense against mosquitoes, Ball said. First is to educate the public about eliminating breeding areas.

Next is simply getting rid of standing water. The third he called "biological control," such as planting mosquito fish in water where the insects are developing.

Beyond that, staff use chemicals to prevent the larva from turning into adult mosquitoes.

The last resort, after mosquitoes are flying, is to send trucks through neighborhoods to spray adult populations of the insects.

A website devoted to West Nile virus in California indicates there has been very little activity in the state so far this year.

To date, five dead birds infected with West Nile have been found in two counties: Los Angeles and Santa Clara.

The Web site is at <http://westnile.ca.gov>.

Ball said West Nile virus lives in birds year round. When the weather warms up, the virus becomes more active in the birds. At that time, mosquitoes that bite infected birds easily become infected with the virus themselves and can pass it on to other animals and people.

Staff writer Larry Mitchell can be reached at 896-7759 or lmitchell@chicoer.com.