

OUR NASTY LITTLE GNATS!

In the past, a THIA board member worked with the Maricopa County Health Department (MCHD) in an effort to identify, and hopefully control, the terrible little gnat that delights in eating us alive during the late spring and into the summer months. Listed are facts researched by the MCHD and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS).

The gnat which bites and annoys us is name Lettoconups Torrens – let's call him LeTo. There are other species of kant-type insects in Tonto Hills, but LeTo is the only one captured to date that has the ability to bite. LeTo is normally called the "Valley Black Gnat" and is common to California valleys. LeTo's life cycle requires ponds that alternately fill and then dry up. The larva, buried underground in cracked mud 6 to 30 inches deep, and the larva can be underground waiting to hatch for up to 3 years or longer.

MCHD and ADHS personnel hiked all of Tonto Hills and determined that there are no adequate breeding areas within Tonto Hills, and this included horse corrals. Therefore, LeTo is flying in from other areas. After LeTo gets to Tonto Hills, it finds its victim (us!) by homing in on the carbon dioxide which we exhale while breathing.

MCHD and ADHS personnel determined that LeTo is being attracted to the hillsides of Tonto Hills by outdoor night lighting which they can see for as far away as 10 miles! This explains why our early residents claim there were no black gnats in Tonto Hills when they first moved here.

Bug zappers kill very few of the LeTo, and unfortunately attract and kill other insects such as the praying mantis. Each LeTo survives its entire flying stage (approx. 8-12 wks) in Tonto Hills due to the cooler, ambient temperatures. They would die in the Valley. There is no practical area-wide way to kill flying LeTos. They typically fly away from sprays, only to return after the spray disperses. These sprays are oftentimes toxic to inhale and could adversely affect us, our pets and animals.

In summary – Prevention is the recommendation from the experts, and that is to REDUCE the attraction and ELIMINATE all unnecessary use of outdoor night lighting, especially during spring and summer. Not only do night lights attract LeTos, but they can disturb neighbors and residents who wish to enjoy our night skies. With the increase of development in Tonto Hills and the number of residents expanding rather bright decorative landscaping lighting, the LeTo will remain a constant pest until changes are implemented.

Solution – If it is absolutely necessary to have an outside light, use 10-25 watt yellow and "bug" lights; motion sensor lights with a reasonable "on" time when triggered; or hooded lighting with "bug" lights. Even use of low-watt hooded solar lights can help. These lighting changes can significantly impact the LeTo's presence in Tonto Hills – and allow your neighbors to enjoy our beautiful night skies.

Thank you for making modifications to your night lighting to rid the gnat, LeTo, in Tonto Hills!