

SYMPHOROMYIA BITING IN NEW YORK STATE (DIPTERA, RHAGIONIDAE)

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In western North America, biting snipe flies of the genus *Symphoromyia* may be troublesome in their attacks on man. Accounts of such attacks are well documented. Osten Sacken (1877) seems to have been the first to report such attacks which he attributed to some undescribed species in California. Aldrich (1915) records *Symphoromyia* attacking stage horses and passengers in Mount Ranier National Park in 1905. He also quotes T. D. A. Cockerell on attacks in Colorado and reports being bitten himself near Moscow, Idaho in 1913.

Other selected references to *Symphoromyia* biting humans, usually in sufficient numbers to be troublesome, include Knab and Cooley (1912) and Mills (1943) in Montana; Stanford (1931) and Knowlton

and Maddock (1944) in Utah; Hearle (1929) and Ross (1940) in British Columbia; Shemanchuk and Weintraub (1961) in Alberta; Travis (1949), Sailer (1951), Frohne and Williams (1951) and Frohne (1959) in southern Alaska.

Most of the above workers tried to identify the species involved. Unfortunately the systematics of *Symphoromyia* are currently in such an unsettled state that it does not appear wise to help perpetuate the names used by repeating them. Certainly, however, more than one species was involved.

There appear to be no published records of *Symphoromyia* attacking man in eastern North America. There also appear to be no records of eastern *Symphoromyia* reaching the high population levels re-

ported by some of the above workers so that biting of humans in the east is more likely to be rare and sporadic.

On three occasions I have been bitten by what appears to be an undescribed species of the *Symphoromyia hirta* complex. In all three cases I did not know that *Symphoromyia* was present or that I was under attack until I felt the bite. In all cases the fly doing the biting was collected during the act simply by picking it up with the fingers. Unlike *Chrysops* in similar situations, it made no attempt to escape.

I was first bitten behind the left ear on 16 June 1944 near Castile, N. Y. at the edge of the Genesee River gorge. I was bitten on the left cheek on 26 June 1948 while reading in the yard of my home at Lockport, N. Y. On 27 June 1963 I was bitten on the left shoulder through a heavy shirt at Malloryville, Tompkins County, N. Y. No other specimens were seen at Castile or Lockport but after collecting the biting specimen at Malloryville, two other females were noted circling my head and were netted.

At least this species of *Symphoromyia* seems to be a reluctant biter. On 25 June 1947 at Springville, N. Y., I noted several *Symphoromyia* circling my head. These were collected only after waiting several minutes to give them an opportunity to bite. Again on 18 and 30 June 1963 at Danby, N. Y. circling females were given the opportunity to bite but did not do so. Occasionally one would alight on me and my companion and walk slowly around before flying away.

Unlike most species of *Chrysops*, the circling flight of *Symphoromyia* is almost noiseless and if it were an aggressive biter it could land and be undetected in most cases until the proboscis was inserted. The bite is quite painful, at least as much so as from a *Chrysops* of comparable size. When walking on clothing or skin the *Symphoromyia* at Danby gave an appearance of clumsiness and uncertainty quite un-

like the business-like attack of *Chrysops*.

Attempts to locate the immature forms of *Symphoromyia* near Danby, N. Y. where on several occasions adults of both sexes have been found in fair numbers, were unsuccessful. It is only recently that the first immatures of any Nearctic *Symphoromyia* were discovered (Sommerman, 1962).

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