

Distinguishing harmless midges from blood feeding female mosquitoes

Midges from the insect family Chironomidae, also known as non-biting gnats, can be confused with mosquitoes. Species similar in size to mosquitoes, they often form swarms, sometimes called “ghosts”, and circle about people’s heads on warm evenings. They aren’t looking to bite people, but rather use us and other vertical objects, like posts and small trees, as gathering points for swarms so the males and females can find each other to mate. They cannot bite us as they lack a proboscis mouth part. If the wind comes up the midges may try to land on the person they are swarming above to avoid being blown away from their preferred habitat.

Left image: A male non-biting midge, while stationary, holds their front pair of legs up. They lack a biting proboscis. Close up on right shows the feathery antennae. *Photo by Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org.*



Left image: Female flood water species mosquito with the prominent proboscis necessary for blood feeding. *Photo by David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org.* Male mosquito on the right has feathery antennae and long plumose palpi and proboscis that is used for nectar feeding. *Photo by Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org.*



Non-biting midges are an important part of aquatic ecosystems but their numbers can become so great as to become a nuisance. The information found at this NCSU web site goes into detail on their biology, ecology, and management when and if they become a problem.

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Urban/midges.htm>

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