

APPLEGATE OUTBACK: MY OPINION

The extermination of the horsefly

BY BOB FISCHER



I believe in the concept of biodiversity, that each species of plant and animal has a place and a purpose on this earth, whether or not we humans understand or appreciate it.

Having assumed mastery of our planet, I believe that mankind also has assumed responsibility to maintain it in as natural a state as we possibly can. Not when it is convenient and not just when it is economical.

Now that I have established my position of record on the moral and philosophic high ground, I have a confession to make.

I can see no reason for the continued existence of horseflies! I hate horseflies, or deer flies as they also are known. Hate Them! This is not a phobia. I like snakes, I find horny toads interesting, and I am on speaking terms with many lizards. But horseflies are different. Horseflies are evil.

Horseflies do not bite for food or to protect themselves; they bite to inflict pain.

Mosquitoes are bad enough with their clever, soft whining approach and their guerrilla-like stabs for blood. You don't even feel the pain until they have gone. Like true guerillas, mosquitoes receive little respect, which means they are consistently underestimated.

My old hunting partner actually could ignore mosquitoes when they landed on him. While I slapped and complained, he sat unperturbed by the whirring insects that covered us. He

had hide the color and consistency of plywood, and the patience of a mountainside. Those characteristics helped him overcome mosquitoes.

But I once watched that same man drop his rifle, backpack and hat into a stream as he reacted to a horsefly bite while trying to cross a fallen log.

Show me a man who can ignore the wretched stinging bite of a horsefly and I will show you a cadaver.

Horseflies don't care anything about guerrilla tactics; they are the strike force of the insect world. Horseflies make no attempt at stealth, but depend on their sense of timing for protection. Their timing is incredible. Rarely do horseflies appear unless you have both hands committed to some activity that will keep you from retaliating.

A favorite horsefly technique is to attack fishermen wading in a noisy stream. Not only can the angler not hear a fly approaching over the river noise, but it is difficult to react even after he has been bitten. An off-balanced retaliatory blow or a misplaced step and you can end up like I once did—soaked to the skin and 30 yards downstream without my fishing gear.

One time I watched my friend, Rex Fletcher, under horsefly attack during a barbecue get-together at his place. He was carrying a large bowl full of home brew to a table. Just short of the table he cocked his head as though to listen closely. His body suddenly stiffened, his head snapped back, and he

began slapping the back of his head and neck hard enough to chip vertebrae. The bowl was forgotten with his pain and rage—it dropped to the ground where it behaved exactly as you would expect a ten-gallon bowl to behave.

The despairing groans from everyone at the bowl's explosive destruction were almost overpowering, but they were overcome by the roar that burst from Rex's mouth. In what I recognized as a classic response to a horsefly bite, Rex's cry of "YAAAAHHHH!" announced both his pain and his resolute decision to battle this ancient enemy. Having scraped the attacker from his neck, Rex circled warily waiting for the next attack that was certain to come.

Horseflies are very stubborn. They are not like the psychopathic yellow jackets that attack anyone at anytime. Once a horsefly establishes a target, they return again and again to bite that same person. So, if you are not the unlucky victim, it is often safe to stand nearby and watch the whole thing take place.

And that is exactly what occurred. While we watched, the horsefly landed twice on Rex's bare arms and neck. Both times the fly managed to get into the air before Rex's blows fell.

Finally, Rex steeled himself for the time-honored "let-him-bite-you-so-you-can-kill-him horsefly-elimination technique." Rex stood still as the fly came buzzing in. He stayed calm and still as the horsefly landed on him. Then

he erupted into a frenzy as the horsefly bit. The horsefly was unable to disengage quickly enough to escape. It was caught by the flurry of blows, stunned and then knocked to the dirt.

Had it been a mosquito, Rex would have been satisfied with a simple brush-off. Even a tick, flea or yellow jacket would have been forgotten once it was no longer a threat. But horseflies, which give no quarter in their battles, rarely receive it either.

With another blood-curdling "YAAAAHHHH!" Rex stomped the horsefly into the ground, repeatedly jumping on it with both feet. Time and time again he pounded it, screaming each time he did so.

Finally, with his shirttail hanging loose and a trickle of blood draining down his neck from the first bite, Rex stood with his head hanging, exhausted but triumphant. A few of the guys over at the picnic tables applauded.

Scattered conversations indicated that many of the guys deplored the death of the fly. I wanted to stand and discuss this with them, but the line at the broken bowl was getting long. For it took quite a while for everyone to jump up and down on the dead horsefly while raising their arms and screaming "YAAAAHHHH!" Good old home brew.

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BACK IN TIME

Ruffled feathers

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

Turkeys! Not my favorite farm animal. Actually, I can't remember seeing very many turkeys on Applegate farms, but my McKee grandmother had half a dozen or so. She always fixed a turkey dinner for Thanksgiving and Christmas and I did not mind their demise for a good reason. To a young child they seemed so big and frightening and, since they were not fenced in, they roamed wherever I might be.

I did not mind crossing the scary foot bridge over the river and the quarter mile walk to grandmother's, but having to escape those turkeys before getting to her front gate was quite a challenge. Those turkeys would chase me, probably thinking I had some food. On one of my visits I had stayed until Grandmother said it was beginning to get dark and I better get home. I took off in a hurry and on the way I walked under some big fir and pine trees. Then I felt some splats on my head. I looked up and saw those darn turkeys roosting on the limbs above. Ohhhhhhhhh, I was so mad!!!

Years later my brother raised the same kind of turkeys on his ranch here in the Upper Applegate. He started with a small flock and found it quite profitable.

He kept the hens, selling the eggs to a hatchery. I helped with some of the egg gathering and there was one old hen who did not like my taking her eggs. When I made the gathering, about every hour, she would bristle up and give me a good peck on my hand. My brother said to throw her over the fence into another area since she wanted to set on her eggs and become a momma. So I then tried to get a hold of her tail feathers before she could peck me, but she would spring from her nest and outrun me.

I became exhausted after each chase around that big nesting area. Finally I managed to grab a part of her tail, which left her with fewer feathers. Eventually, she lost all of them and I still was unable to catch her. That's when my brother couldn't stop laughing at my problem and came to help. He soon took care of it by outrunning her. She would still ruffle her feathers and bristle whenever she saw me coming near. Poor thing—she did look funny with no tail feathers.

In the spring my brother's large brooder house would be full of young ones that were later turned out in his fields to finish growing on a special mix



Morris Byrne and his large flock of turkeys on Upper Applegate Road circa 1942 (from Evelyn Byrne Williams collection).

of grains put in feed boxes. In following years, the boxes were replaced with large metal self-feeding containers, which saved time and energy in keeping the turkeys fed. My brother soon found the turkeys were more profitable than his cattle and began raising large flocks of the white, broad-breasted ones, both for eggs and meat. A truck would come to take the turkeys for processing before Thanksgiving and Christmas.

For many years the turkey ranch on Upper Applegate Road, and even a second ranch on Highway 238 in Ruch, were landmarks well known by locals. Eventually progress put my brother out

of business as it became cheaper to have large operations all in one big building.

Years went by without seeing a turkey in the Applegate, but now I see the same old kind of turkeys that my grandmother and brother first had. I don't know if there really were wild turkeys here in those days; I don't remember ever seeing any. All I can say is that I don't dislike them now, but when they come in my yard I sure get tired of chasing them. Again!!

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