



Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon
Borough Council



THE LOUGH NEAGH FLY

FACT SHEET

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The name 'Lough Neagh Fly' is the collective name given to several species of midge fly that can be found swarming around Lough Neagh during late spring and early summer.

The flies are non-biting midges of the Chironomid family and are commonly found around bodies of shallow fresh water. The highest concentrations of the flies occur in Ireland around April and May, although other peaks may occur throughout the summer months.

The Lough Neagh Fly has a complex life cycle which takes about a year to complete.

The adults first appear in the spring, emerging from the Lough as the temperature begins to rise. They gather in large swarms and can often be seen over the woodland, grassland or areas of scrub, where they spiral upwards like plumes of smoke.

The adult flies have a short lifespan, living for only 2-3 days. They have no mouth parts and do not feed or bite and their short life gives them only enough time to mate and to lay their eggs. The eggs are laid on the surface of the water by the adult females. These sink to the bottom of the Lough and develop there for several days before hatching. The eggs hatch into larvae which feed on algae, dead plant material and other small animals found at the bottom of the Lough.

The larva is a worm like creature, appearing red in colour due to the haemoglobin in its body giving it the more common name of 'bloodworm'. Bloodworms live in a silky tube buried in the mud and many thousands may be found in every square metre of the Lough bed.

After 9-12 months, the bloodworm develops a protective pupal case. The pupa is the resting stage in the life cycle of the Lough Neagh Fly during which it develops into an adult. When the adult is ready to emerge, the pupa rises rapidly to the surface and breaks open. This is a dangerous stage in the life cycle as many are eaten by birds and fish.



Life cycle of Lough Neagh Fly - Art work provided by Chris Stephens.

The Chironomid midge fly is an important component in the ecosystem of the Lough throughout the year. The bloodworms are food for fish, eels and wildfowl and during the

winter months the adult flies provide food for both resident and migratory insect eating birds during the spring and summer.



This fly is not unique to Lough Neagh and occurs in other lakes throughout Ireland, though not in the same numbers experienced here. Other countries also experience similar types of midge flies during the year. Although we consider them a nuisance from time to time, some countries welcome the flies and consider them an important part of their culture and lifestyle. They celebrate the fly annually and arrange festivals around the time of the main hatch. The life cycle of the fly is celebrated through music, dance and drama as an acknowledgement of its importance to the well-being and success of the community.

Not only are the larvae and adult flies a rich source of protein for other animals in the food chain they are also considered to be an important source of protein for humans. Communities living around Lake Victoria in Africa collect the flies and use them in various dishes and local specialities. When compared with equal amounts of beef, a burger made from flies will contain five times more protein than the average beef burger. Around the shores of Lough Neagh, local people would have gathered the dead flies from the water's edge and used them as a fertiliser on the land.

Conservation Service, Lough Neagh Discovery Centre
Oxford Island NNR, Craigavon, BT66 6NJ

Tel: 028 3832 2205 Web: www.oxfordisland.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/oxfordislandnaturereserve



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