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Fly situation far from stable

By CAROLINE FRANK

NORTHERN shires of Gingin, Chitering and the City of Swan have been badly affected by a heavy outbreak of stable flies.

Stable, or biting, flies can have a devastating effect on livestock and have badly affected the lifestyle of people living in the regions.

Bites are debilitating to animals, resulting in a loss of condition and, in some cases, death. They also cause great discomfort and irritation to people.

Animal owners across the areas are on high alert in a bid to protect their animals.

Forensic entomologist David Cook said the outbreak of flies was spreading, following the breeding period and excellent survival conditions.

"The flies will develop in any sort of rotting vegetable matter, organic waste and animal manure," he said.

"We've had a very wet and intermittently warm spring, which has provided ideal conditions for the biting flies to survive."

Mr Cook said because northern areas of Perth often have livestock and horticulture industries close to each other, the flies are able to continue to multiply.

Swan Hills MLA Frank Alban said vegetable farmers needed to take responsibility for their waste disposal in a bid to halt the outbreak.

"The flies have the potential to seriously affect livestock, so all farmers should have a bin, collect leftover vegetables and dump them. It

does mean a bit of effort but it will save a lot of grief."

Bullsbrook resident Kate Goh said she had spent hundreds of dollars on special rugs to protect her horses from stable fly bites.

"It's a horrendous season," she said. "It's easily the worst for six or seven years."

Stable Fly Action Group member and Bullsbrook resident Anne Sibbel said she knew of cattle that had lost considerable weight as a result of fly strikes.

"The mothers do not feed their babies properly because they are so concerned with moving all the time to try to get rid of the flies," she said.

Minister for Agriculture Terry Redman said the Department of Agriculture and Food had begun a two-year project to develop good agricultural practices to minimise stable fly breeding on horticultural and feedlot operations on the Swan Coastal Plain.

"Such horticultural practices include high-speed mulching as soon as possible after harvest, to break up the crop residue into small pieces, and appropriate management of any reject crop produce," he said.

Mr Redman said since September of this year, the application of raw poultry manure to the land had been totally banned year-round in 13 shires on the Swan Coastal Plain.

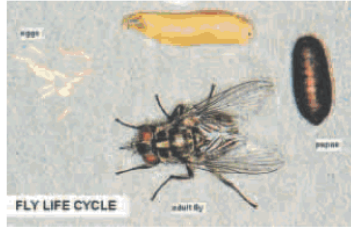
"Previously, the ban was limited from October to May of each year," he said.

At this stage, "there is no intention to remove the year-round ban," he said.



Entomologist David Cook with Bullsbrook horse owner Kate Goh. Picture: Elle Borgward

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WHAT ARE STABLE FLIES?

- The stable fly (*Stomoxys calcitrans*) – also sometimes called the biting fly – is a common fly which mainly bites horses and cattle. It can also attack humans, dogs and pigs.
- Stable flies are difficult to distinguish from house flies, except that stable flies have a bayonet-like mouthpart (proboscis) protruding from the front of the head.
- Adult stable flies (of both sexes) feed during the day, generally in the early morning and late afternoon, and can engorge on blood up to three times their own body weight.

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