



Ask Ranger Bug

Seaweed Flies



Marguerite Canterbury of Yaquina City, Oregon, writes:

Ranger Bug:

What's with all the flies around the lighthouse? They're pretty annoying. Can anything good be said about them?

*Thanks,
Marguerite*

Marguerite:

I'm glad you asked me that question. The flies that you see in large numbers around the lighthouse are called kelp flies, or seaweed flies. Adult flies lay their eggs on seaweeds, particularly those washed up by the tide. The grub-like immature flies feed on the decaying seaweed, which is warm and nutritious. Their rear breathing tubes, called spiracles, are elaborately fringed so they don't fill up with water when the larvae are covered by the tide.

During the summer, the adult flies emerge to feed on nectar from flowers and to swarm over visitors at Yaquina Head. (Look closely and you may see them tip forward to lap salt off your skin.) The adults then mate and lay their eggs on exposed seaweed, beginning the cycle again.

What good can be said about kelp flies? Adults and larvae are a rich source of food for shorebirds (and other animals), which we enjoy watching on Oregon beaches. Also, they don't bite. For this, we all should be grateful.

*Yours truly,
Ranger Bug*

