



“VAMPIRES”

on the Appalachian Trail!

(Creatures that want your blood)

When planning your thru-hike, dealing with biting insects can be a bigger issue than you think. The usual suspects are Mosquitos, Ticks, Green Head and Black Flies. Starting a NOBO hike from Amicalola Falls or Springer Mountain in late Winter or early Spring delays but does not eliminate the onslaught. If you are planning a Flip-Flop or a SOBO hike from Mt. Katahdin, the urgency is amplified, and **YOU NEED TO READ THIS NOW.**

Mosquitos

We are all familiar with mosquitos. However, few are aware of the numbers you may run into or what diseases they may transmit. According to the CDC, diseases carried by



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mosquitos found along course of the A.T. include: Zika and Eastern Equine Encephalitis.

Ticks



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Ticks are an expanding risk to hikers.

The two most notable are the Deer Tick and the Lone Star Tick. There are other ticks (850 species) out there, but these two are the ones responsible for Lyme Disease and Alpha-Gal Syndrome respectively.

Lyme Disease is best known, but ticks can transmit a multitude of bacterial diseases including Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Borrelia (BMD), and others. Symptoms of Lyme disease can include a Bull's Eye rash, joint pain, weakness, headaches, fatigue, and dizziness. Treatment is a course of antibiotic such as Doxycycline. The sooner treatment is started, the better the chance for complete recovery. Ticks can transmit Lyme if attached less than 24 hours. So be sure to **perform a complete body check daily**.

Alpha-Gal Syndrome is a different issue. It is an allergic response. Antibiotics do not help. It causes your body to react adversely to the intake of mammalian protein (meat). This reaction can be severe and may cause anaphylaxis. Treatment is avoidance of meat, antihistamine, steroids, and time.

The insecticide of choice for ticks is Permethrin applied directly to clothing. Extreme care must be used to prevent direct contact with skin. Clothing already treated is available as is professional companies that will treat your clothes for a price.. Additionally, wearing light colored clothing permits easier spotting of ticks.



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Green Head/Horse Flies

These are generally large flies that repeatedly buzz your head and land with stealth until they bite. The bite is painful and causes a large welt. Their mandibles are like the blades of sharp scissors. They cut into your flesh and flex outward severing capillaries and veins.

Then using a salivary-pump they douse the site with anticoagulant. Their syringe like proboscis is the straw used to suck your blood. This can all happen in a split second or they may feed until you smack them. Not only do they punch a large hole in you, the anticoagulant saliva stimulates blood flow, burns, and causes your nerves to respond with pain.

The female Green Head needs blood to finish her reproductive process. They do not just lay a single batch of eggs; they lay continual batches of eggs. Every time they drink blood, they receive enough protein to produce a couple of hundred more eggs. So, one female greenhead can unleash a summer of torture. Imagine what a whole colony of female green heads can do. Also, they are so large that **they are generally unaffected by bug sprays**.



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Black Flies

These flies may be found in the eight northernmost states of the Trail. Black Fly season generally runs from mid-May to mid-July. They tend to attack in swarms and have been known to both suffocate pasture animals by their sheer numbers and exsanguinate others. A single bite is painful followed by annoying itching. The unprepared outdoorsman can literally be driven mad if not ready for the swarms.

During their season you may be continuously engulfed by Black Flies. They are most active between 9-11 AM and 4-7 PM when the humidity is highest. Of note, they generally do not bite at night.

Treatment is topical unless you have an allergic reaction. Prevention should be the goal. DEET and Permethrin help, but DEET can be applied directly to the skin. Keeping covered such as long sleeves and pants with openings tightly closed is the best practice. These bugs are attracted to dark colored clothing, heat, and carbon dioxide produced by the hiker. Head nets are often used to reduce the annoyance of swarms.

CHIGGERS



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The larval form of the chigger, much smaller than the head of a pin, are found in moist ground cover world- wide. These insidious little buggers don't actually suck your blood, but rather they climb up your legs and make an imperceptible hole into your skin. They subsequently inject enzymes that dissolve skin cells which they feed on. These enzymes and the breakdown of tissue produce seemingly insatiable itching which often leads to open sores and secondary infections. The common belief that they burrow in and remain is a myth.

Treatment is topical and the sites generally resolve within 2 weeks provided they are not scratched open.

These are not the only **vampires** on the trail, but they are the most common. Please remember avoid scratching bites as it can lead to infections

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