

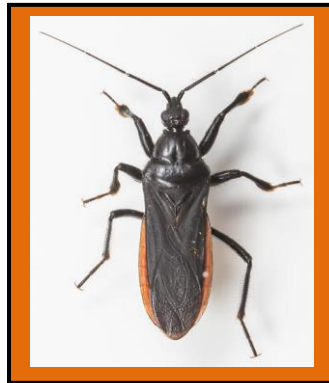
Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / July 2017

Black Corsair

Black Corsair

Class: Insecta (Insects)
Order: Hemiptera
Family: Reduviidae (Assassin Bugs)
Genus: *Melanolestes*
Species: *picipes* (Black Corsair)



Our Bug of the Month comes by way of our Help Desk this month. A lady brought in a bug that bit her daughter. Somewhat fearful of the possible danger it presented, she felt it best to have the bug identified. Eric Day, Entomologist at Virginia

Tech, identified it as a Black Corsair – a member of the Assassin Bug family. *Another common name is the Black May Beetle-eater.* Their species name, *picipes*, means “pitch-black feet.”

Adults are 12-20mm (25mm=1 inch) with males fully winged and female wings varying in size, but “stunted and non-functional.” You can note the difference in photos above -- top right, the female with short wings and, bottom left, the male with full-length wings. It appeared our sample was a male. The bug is black and has a pronounced proboscis which can be used to inflict a painful sting (note the large proboscis in the lower right corner photo above, taken under the underside of a glass plate).

Black Corsairs range from Quebec, Canada to FL, MN, SD, UT and CA (through most of the US except the northwest) and south to Brazil. They hibernate in woods and fields beneath logs and, during the Spring and Summer months, are found under stones, loose bark and other natural cover such as piles of weeds. Females are often flightless and live under logs or stones. Males tend to be attracted to light during Summer months.

Black Corsairs feed on other insects such as caterpillars, earthworms, crickets and the May Beetle. They will attack them from behind using the spongy pads (readily seen in the lower right corner photo above) on their legs to hold them, then sting them and suck them dry (not a pleasant way to go!). The males also use these spongy pads in motivating the female during mating. Eggs are laid singly in the soil beneath rocks.

Though the bite can be painful, they do not feed on blood and do not transmit diseases.

Photo References:

Male Black Corsair, contributed by John Rosenfeld, Allegheny Co., PA, 04/29/2017, Bugguide: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/1362806>

Female Black Corsair, contributed by Mark Etheridge, Dorchester Co., MD, 04/29/2016, Maryland Biodiversity:

http://www.marylandbiodiversity.com/images/201604/mark_etheridge_26627658142_ffdec9e06c_c.jpg

Close-up of Black Corsair showing spongy pads on feet and large proboscis, contributed by Stan Gilliam, Guilford Co., NC, 06/21/2016; <http://bugguide.net/node/view/1242946>

Research References / Resources:

“Assassin Bugs & Ambush Bugs,” UKY Entomology: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CritterFiles/casefile/insects/bugs/assassin/assassin.htm>

BugGuide.net: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/7332?printable=1>