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Dragonflies unleashed to fight mosquitoes

Associated Press

WELLS - Wells is using an old weapon again in the battle to control mosquitoes: it has unleashed 17,000 dragonflies, the natural predator of the blood-sucking insects.

The Wells Chamber of Commerce started the program 26 years ago when controversy arose over the spraying of pesticides in town.

"It does make a heck of a difference," said Marty Goodman, 85, of South Berwick, who has been participating in the program since its inception. "You can sit on my deck and not get bugged to death."

Scores of area residents and businesses, including Sleepytown and Tidewood Motel and Cottages in Wells, and Dixon's Campground and Hoyt's Cottages in Cape Neddick, participate.

The chamber takes orders for dragonfly nymphs in late winter and picks them up from a supplier in the spring. Bags of 50 cost \$30 and bags of 100 cost \$52. Those with a big mosquito problem can get 1,000 for \$450.

This year the chamber filled 150-200 orders for dragonfly nymphs totaling 17,000 dragonflies, said Wendy Griffiths, the chamber's "Dragonfly Queen" and part-time bookkeeper.

"They do eat massive amounts of mosquitoes," she said. "So its an excellent way to control them.

"We have people that come back year after year to replenish them," Griffiths said. "It pays for itself."

However, University of New Hampshire entomologist John Burger questioned whether dragonflies can effectively control mosquitoes.

"It's an interesting idea," Burger said, "but there's not a shred of evidence that it happens as far as I know. I've never seen any studies that quantify the density of mosquitoes and dragonflies."

Goodman doesn't need any studies. She is convinced.

She put her immature dragonflies in different spots in the wetlands surrounding her home. They set to work immediately, eating the mosquito larvae in the water, and later when they hatch, in the air.

"I have no bugs on my lot," Goodman said. "Once in a while I'll see a bee or a wasp, but no mosquitoes."

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