

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 76 (2010)
Heft: [6]

Artikel: Horseflies = Bräame
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944212>

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HELVEZIA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

FAUNA IN SWITZERLAND

Horseflies – Brääme



One creature that hasn't made it to New Zealand! Or have you encountered Brääme here? I hope not. Those of us who grew up in Switzerland might remember the Brääme only too well. Those born here: Aren't you lucky!

Horseflies range in length from 30 to 60 mm. They are among the world's largest true flies. They are known to be extremely noisy during flight. They are important pollinators of flowers, especially in South Africa.

Horseflies occur worldwide, and are absent only at extreme northern and southern latitudes (and in New Zealand...). In Australia, they are known as 'March Flies'. There are approximately 3,000 species of horse flies known worldwide. Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist famous for the systematization of plants, must have been driven to despair by horseflies; he scientifically described and named what is now called the common horse fly, genus *Tabanus* Linnaeus, over 250 years ago, in 1758!

Adult horseflies feed on nectar and sometimes pollen. Females require a blood meal for reproduction. Unlike insects which surreptitiously puncture the skin with needle-like organs, female horse flies have tiny, serrated mandibles which they use to rip and/or slice flesh apart. They can then lap up the

blood. Males lack the necessary mouth parts for blood feeding. Most female horse flies feed on mammal blood, but some species are known to feed on birds, amphibians or reptiles. The bite from a large specimen is painful, especially considering the agile nature of the fly.

The horsefly's *modus operandi* is less secretive than that of its mosquito counterparts, although it still aims to escape before the victim can react. Moreover, the pain of a horsefly bite may mean that the victim is more concerned with assessing the wound, and not swatting the interloper. The bites may become itchy, sometimes causing a large swelling afterward if not treated quickly.

The female horsefly lays eggs on stones close to water on plant stems or leaves. On hatching, the larvae fall into water or moist earth, feeding voraciously on invertebrates, such as snails and earthworms.

Luckily, mankind has allies in the battle against horseflies. Aside from generalized predators such as birds, there are also specialist predators such as the horse guard wasp, a type of sand wasp that preferentially attacks horseflies.

Wikipedia/tb



Horsefly – *Tabanus* Linnaeus