

This bug's 'kiss' isn't so nice

Pandora really did it when she sneaked a peek into the forbidden box. Unleashed, among other nuisances and banes to mankind, were some rather pesky insects and bugs.

Reduviidae is the scientific family name for true bugs. *Triatoma sanguisugais* is a species that, unfortunately, thrives nicely within the Lowland Southwestern deserts up to 6,000-foot elevations.

Commonly, *Triatoma* hails to a variety of names: bellows bug, assassin bug, Hualapai (Walapi) tiger, cone-nose beetle, cross bug, or kissing bug. As his names imply, this bug is neither friendly, nor is his "kiss" nice. His appearance resembles the squash bugs and one can feel free to squash *Triatoma* without a twinge of conscience.

To identify *Triatoma*, look for these characteristics: a protruding, cone-shaped proboscis nose, followed by short antennae and protruding eyes; the flattish, oval-shaped, six-legged body, which is segmented with an obvious definition at the neck. Overlapped, light-to-dark brown to blackish wings are noticeable, but the most obvious clue is the red-orange stripe along the outer edges of the back.

Length varies among the species and with age. Juveniles are about one-half inch to about 1.5 inches for an adult.

Early May is generally when the winged adults emerge to begin their dispersal flights. May and June are their most active months, but Walapi persists throughout the summer and into October.

This bug is nocturnal. In the daytime, he remains hidden. If a

under rugs, bedding, curtains and crevices are among the favorite hiding places.

His feeding habits are parasitic and exclusive to warm-blooded vertebrates. A favorite victim is the wood or pack rat, and this rodent's nest is where the cone-nose breeds and multiplies.

At night he is alert and active by wing and foot, and seems to

hands, soles of feet, neck and groin can occur. Highly sensitized individuals may experience illness, light depression, quickened pulse, general weakness and nausea.

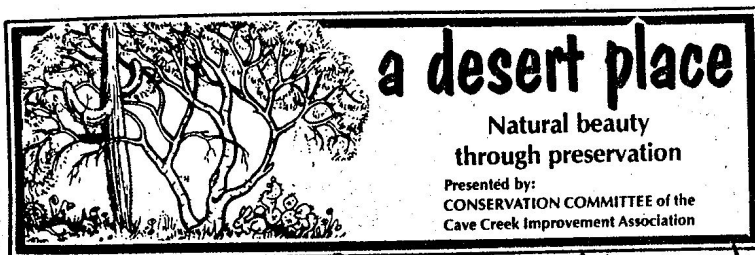
Also, it is important to be aware that in any blood-sucking bite, the proboscis can be contaminated with pathogenic organisms. If these organisms

tack behavior to prey that is awake and active.

Should one be bitten, first aid can be effective to relieve the symptoms, but remedies and techniques vary and change. Some reactions require immediate medical care. Direct your inquiries for home treatment to experienced professionals.

Since the cone-nose beetle does inhabit the Foothills, additional knowledge is also a good defense strategy. Literature is available. "Poisonous Dwellers of the Desert," by Natt N. Dodge, is a booklet on the Foothills library's shelves and for sale at several local shops. This book provides valuable reference for both insects and reptiles. The Arizona Sonoran Desert Museum publishes a concise brochure titled "Venomous Creatures of the Southwest."

It also is good to know that the Arizona Poison Control System will provide additional information and assistance, emergency or otherwise, on a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week basis by phone. The toll-free number is 1-800-362-0101.



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be attracted to lighted windows. One must often be swift to zap him. He is sneaky and does not approach or bite when the victim is actively awake, but prefers quiet or sleeping prey.

The "kiss" is not sudden, and at this point is almost painless. This bite is achieved by piercing the victim's skin with the four stylets in the proboscis, through which the blood is sucked from the capillaries. Often the penetrations are multiple as the bug strolls along the unsuspecting host's skin. Engorgement can take 10 minutes.

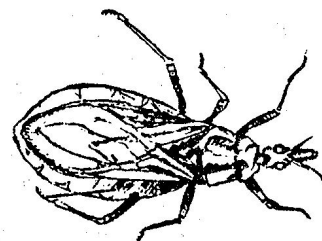
Immediately after being bitten, however, the victim can awaken and react to severe itching and discomfort. Depending upon the allergic sensitivity of an individual, one's reaction can vary from fairly mild itching, reddening and swelling to severe, painful, large swollen welts.

Other reactions, such as general body swelling, nettle-like

become localized, "infected," near the puncture or gain access to the blood stream, serious complications can result.

What is a plan for defense against Pandora's indiscretion? Prevention, rather than treatment, is the best strategy. Weatherstrip windows and doors, fill cracks, disturb the hiding places and before retiring, search the bedding. Know exactly what this bug looks like and stalk him offensively.

Do not hesitate to be aggressive with the flyswatter, rolled newspaper, well-directed shoe sold, or whatever else is handy and effective. Remember, the kissing bug does not display at-



Triatoma sanguisugais