



Superfly? Not In the Good Way

Meet the humble botfly, an insect with a story that horrifies and, in one famous case, humiliates.

By Jay Ingram Illustration by Pete Ryan

Sometimes a walk in the Canadian woods can be hazardous: there are bears, cougars, rutting moose, ticks — you name it. Botflies aren't usually on the list, but imagine having their larvae shot into your eye. This actually happened to a Swedish woman named Malin Hallgren. She had to have the larvae removed by a doctor over concerns they would hook into her cornea and cause permanent damage by drilling into the eye itself.

Just another scary parasite story, right? Of course. But it's also true that botfly reproduction is a gruesome subject. As Hallgren found out, they hover in front

of a target animal and produce a stream of larvae already hatched from eggs inside the female. This stream is usually aimed the nostrils of a deer (or moose or elk), which are in about the same orientation as human eyes.

The larvae are literally blown out of the female by a process called "hydraulic expulsion" (which at one time might have been the perfect name for a band). The name describes the process perfectly: build up pressure, release it suddenly as you open a nozzle, and bang, the larvae are now in the unfortunate animal's nostrils, hooking themselves in. They'll stay there and grow for a little while, then move on to the back of the nose or the throat.

Eventually, when the larvae mature, they'll trigger another explosive event, causing their host to sneeze a load of blood and mucus. The goo also carries four-centimetre-long larvae, which are now ready to pupate.

All things considered, it's not surprising that deer botflies are often overlooked. But they do have a special place in entomological lore. And