

## Blow Flies, Cluster Flies, and Screw-Worm Flies

By Arthur L. Antonelli, Extension Entomologist  
WSU Puyallup

Blow flies (Fig. 1) are common in our area and probably occur in houses and similar locations at least as often as the house fly. We have several kinds of blow flies, including the bluebottle and greenbottle flies, the cluster fly, and the bird screw-worm fly. All belong to the family Calliphoridae.

Bluebottle flies have metallic blue abdomens; greenbottle flies are shiny green or bluish green. In general, these blow flies are somewhat larger than house flies and live in dead animals, manure, other sources of decaying matter, and similar situations. The flies and other maggots have been found in areas near dead birds and rodents in houses. Keep these flies away from food, especially meat and fish, as they not only promote unsanitary conditions, but on rare occasions also cause severe stomach or intestinal disorders if their eggs or maggots are swallowed. These flies can also spread disease.

Cluster flies (Fig. 2) are dark gray and slightly larger than house flies. They cluster together in houses to overwinter, usually revealing themselves in fall when entering and in spring when leaving. The maggots parasitize earthworms.

The maggots of the bird screw-worm fly (*Protophthora* spp.; Fig. 3) suck the blood of young birds in their nests. The birds may be killed. The maggots often drop out of the nests and are found by homeowners and others who become concerned about the source of the maggots. (This screw-worm should not be confused with the much more notorious screw-worm of livestock in the southern and southwestern United States.)

### Management

Sanitation and denying flies entry into the home are the major means of controlling these pests.

Keep garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids. Spray garbage cans frequently with insecticides labeled for this purpose if the flies are numerous. Dispose of all fly and maggot feeding areas including plant and animal refuse. Since cluster fly maggots parasitize earthworms, control of these maggots is not practical. If the flies are abundant outdoors and around the home, spray the outside fly resting places and all screens and window borders with an insecticide labeled for this use. Treat inside areas where flies congregate with household sprays and bombs labeled for this use. Also, several available light traps may help to reduce fly numbers indoors. Do not use such traps outdoors as they trap and kill many beneficial insects. When using pesticides, be sure to follow all label directions and precautions carefully.

To keep flies out of the home, close all openings through which they enter, such as holes where pipes and wires enter the building, sash-cord channels, and cracks around windows and between moldings and boards. Be sure window and door screens are used and in proper condition. Also, be certain the attic is “bug proof” (e.g. vent screens in good repair) as flies will seek protection there for the winter. Also, the mesh size of vent screens must be small enough to prevent fly entry. The heat from the house rising into the attic can cause the flies to seek the origins of the warmth, often resulting in their collecting in light fixtures, etc.



**Fig. 1. An adult blowfly. By K. Grey.**



**Fig. 2. An adult cluster fly. By K. Grey.**



**Fig. 3. Screw-worm larvae. Author unknown.**

Selected references:

Ebeling, Walter. *Urban Entomology*. Berkeley: University of California, 1978.  
Peterson, *Larvae of Insects. Part II*. Edwards Bros., Inc. 1971.