

Local Boy's Mosquito Bite Turns Out To Be Rare Case of Botfly Larvae Infestation

By Ryan Schlehuber

What was first thought to be an allergic reaction to a mosquito bite turned out to be a rare case of a botfly larvae infestation for six-year-old Logan DeKeyser. The little worm-like creature lived for almost a week just under the skin on his cheek, before his mother saw it moving and doctors surgically removed it.

The ordeal began Saturday, July 29, with what his mother, Candy, thought was a mosquito bite. By the next day, his face had swollen, so she took him to the emergency room at Mackinac Straits Hospital, where he was treated for an allergic reaction and sent home. The next day, his face was worse, and so back to the hospital he went, where, this time, the diagnosis was cellulitis, for which antibiotics were given.

By the fourth day, Logan's eye had swollen shut and he was admitted to Mackinac Straits Hospital and given antibiotics intravenously, to speed its absorption.

By Thursday night, he was at Northern Michigan Hospital in Petoskey. The swelling by his chin resided, but under his eye, where doctors thought he had been bitten by a mosquito, the skin was puffy and shiny red, said his mother.



The swelling on six-year-old Logan DeKeyser's face was initially thought to be an allergic reaction to a mosquito bite, but turned out to be a rare case of infestation of a rodent botfly larvae in his left cheek. (Photograph provided by Candy DeKeyser)

"Nobody knew what was going on," she recalls.

That night, while staying with Logan in his hospital room, she noticed a tiny amount of blood bubbling and then disappearing from the small open wound. Then she saw something even more alarming; a tiny white object peeked out from the wound, wiggled, and then disappeared back

into the wound.

She notified a nurse, who saw it for herself, and then another nurse was called in to verify the frightening discovery.

Soon, Logan was visited by a general surgeon, a pediatrician, and an emergency room physician to analyze the object in Logan's cheek.

"They thought it was a worm," said Mrs. DeKeyser, a Mackinac County Michigan State University Extension employee. "It was only as big as a pencil lead."

Instead of prying the tiny larvae

out with tweezers, the doctors decided to surgically remove it to avoid accidentally pinching it in half and making recovery of the entire object more difficult.

The operation was short and successful.

Doctors made an incision and successfully removed the larvae, which was sent to entomologist Richard Merritt, a professor and chairman of the Department of Entomology at Michigan State University. He determined that the worm was a second stage rodent botfly larvae.

Finding botfly larvae on humans is rare, but not unheard of, said Dr. Merritt, who can document only about 70 known cases of rodent botfly infestation in humans in North America.

"They're quite common on dogs, cats, rabbits, and other rodents," he said.

In fact, he said, he received another rodent botfly larvae the same week he received Logan's. It was taken from a dog in Arizona.

"Rodent botflies lay their eggs near rodent burrows or areas where rodents commonly go," Prof. Merritt said. "The eggs are attracted to heat and usually hatch once exposed to body heat produced by the rodent. Logan may have gotten it on his clothes when he was playing in the backyard at home."

Prof. Merritt speculates that the larvae, which in its early stage is about three millimeters long, may

have already hatched before clinging onto Logan. Once it made it on to its host, it traveled to his face and burrowed just under the skin on his cheek.

When Logan complained to his mother that it felt like something was running down his face, it was actually the larvae moving around in the warble, or burrowed area, in his cheek. The bubbling of blood Mrs. DeKeyser saw, said Dr. Merritt, was the larvae cleaning out the warble to breath while it feeds on the host's tissue inside.

"That is why they burrow only skin deep, to be able to breath and, after a few weeks or a month of no disturbance, they leave, drop to the ground, form a pupa, and emerge as an adult botfly," Dr. Merritt explained.

"The amazing thing about botfly larvae is once it leaves its host, the mark is gone," he said. "They secrete an antibiotic that usually prevents secondary swelling. They take care of their host and are careful not to damage it so it can be used again."

Depending on where the larvae penetrates the skin, it mostly causes irritation and swelling, though more severe complications can be inflicted when a larvae burrows on the throat or near the eye, for example.

"A good sign that you have a rodent botfly larvae is that you can

feel it wiggle," he said.

Dabbing Vaseline to block the air hole and carefully pinching the larvae out from the wound is the best way to remove it, said Dr. Merritt. If unsuccessful, the person should visit a physician to assist in removing it by other means.

Rodent botflies are a native species to North America. Its cousin, the human botfly, is found in Central America. A human botfly captures mosquitoes and transfers its eggs on to it, which the mosquito, in turn, transfers onto a human when it goes to draw blood from the host. Rodent botflies lay eggs near rodent burrows in hopes of latching on to a host.

Logan has fully recovered and has gained some fame around town.

"It's made my son a celebrity," his mother said. "Everyone's calling him 'bug boy' now."



Above: Botfly larva. (Photograph courtesy of Dr. Merritt, MSU Entomology Department.)

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Les Cheneaux Lions Club President Judy Izzard (far left) initiates new club members (from left) Chuck and Margie Denoyer and Michele Royan during the organization's August 14 dinner meeting at First Union Church in Cedarville.

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OBITUARY

Wallace 'Wally' Ollila

Wallace "Wally" Matthew Ollila, 80, of Jackson and Cedarville, was a decorated World War II veteran who was employed as a teacher and the Dean of Occupational Education at Jackson Community College. Mr. Ollila died Sunday, August 6, 2006.

He was born January 28, 1926, to Mattie August and Nelma (nee Hakala) Ollila. Although he was born in Detroit, he grew up in Hancock and considered himself an Upper Peninsula native. Orphaned at an early age, he and his four siblings lived with relatives and then lived at the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids.

Mr. Ollila served in World War II and was distinguished with a Purple Heart, two Bronze Stars, and several other decorations. He earned an associate's degree from Suomi College in Hancock, a bachelor's degree from Northern Michigan University, and a master's degree from Eastern

Michigan University. Mr. Ollila was a member and elder at Jackson First Presbyterian Church, where he sang in the choir. He served his community on the United Way board, the local and national YMCA boards, Speech and Hearing Clinic board, and the JCC Foundation Board.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Patricia Eve Ollila, a daughter and her family, Wendy and Randall Treacher, and a son and his family, Eric and Teri Ollila. He was a loving grandfather of Andrea, Sarah, and Matthew Ollila, Tim and Mark Lake, and Colin Treacher.

A funeral was held at First Presbyterian Church Wednesday, August 9, at 11 a.m. with the Reverend James Hegedus officiating. Visitation was held at the church Tuesday, August 8, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., and Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Burial was at Cedar Cemetery in Cedarville.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be directed to the scholarship fund at Jackson First Presbyterian Church or the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids.

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