

Aquatic Midge Fly Swarming Controlled with Vertex Aeration

Introduction:

Hibbs Grove, a residential housing development located in Cooper City, Florida in southern Broward County was experiencing an ongoing outbreak of swarming non-biting midge flies (Order: Diptera, Family: Chironomidae) preventing them from enjoying their lakefront property. The community has a 6.5 acre lake with an average center depth of 22 feet, shaped like the capital letter "E", located in the middle of the development.

While larvae densities greater than 1,000 per square meter are considered to be at nuisance levels, often densities over 4,000 larvae per square meter can occur on the bottoms of nutrient rich lakes, ponds, and canals (Apperson, C. and Waldrogl, M.). Midge fly larvae feed and develop within the rich organic matter and low oxygen level environment on the bottom before emerging at the water surface. Midges are generally large larvae that are red colored; hence, the term 'blood worm'. Their red colored body is due to the presence of highly efficient hemoglobin that can store oxygen better than other organisms. This hemoglobin allows midges to live in habitats that have limited oxygen such as lake bottoms or areas of high organic pollution where other organisms cannot (Soil and Water Conservation Society). Because of their unique ability to survive in the presence of very low oxygen, midge larvae are often free of competition for space and food and experience limited predation from fish and other insects. This absence of competition allows midge populations to quickly spread and dominate the bottom sediment. During the surface emergence cycle of midge flies, it is not unusual for several thousand adults per square meter of surface area to erupt on a nightly basis for several weeks. This emergence can cause a variety of health, safety and annoyance problems for those who reside within the flight range of these insects (Apperson, C. and Waldrogl, M.).

In order to combat their swarming midge fly problem, the residents of Hibbs Grove turned to Vertex Water Features for an environmentally safe solution. Vertex Water Features surveyed the lake and proposed a CoActive Air 5 aeration system which was installed on February 5, 2005. The system is designed to raise the lake's bottom dissolved oxygen levels and create an overall healthier body of water. The Vertex aeration system provided diffused air through five Vertex XL2 CoActive AirStations™ placed at the deepest points throughout the lake, effectively circulating the entire water column 0.76 times per day.

Methods:

Midge Fly Survey: A total of three sediment samples were taken from the lake each month (Figure 2). One grab of the sediment was taken at each station within the lake using a 6" X 6" X 6" Ekman bottom dredge. Samples were analyzed in the Vertex Pompano Beach laboratory by slowly sieving the sediment to separate out the larvae (Ali, A. and Lobinske, R.). Larvae were

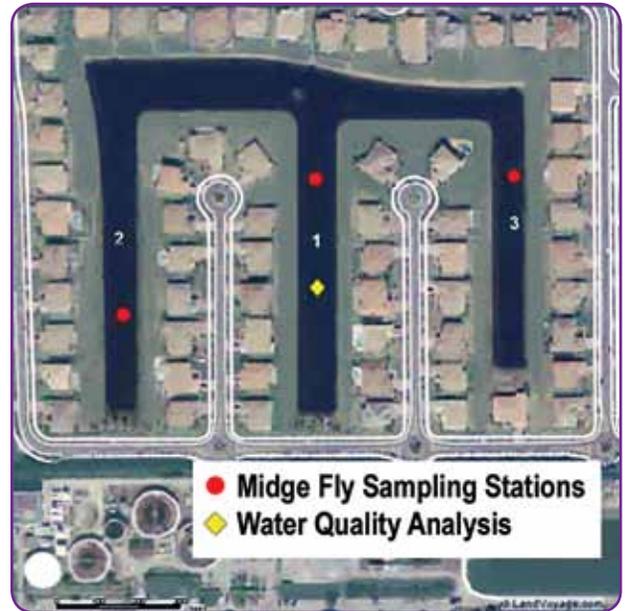
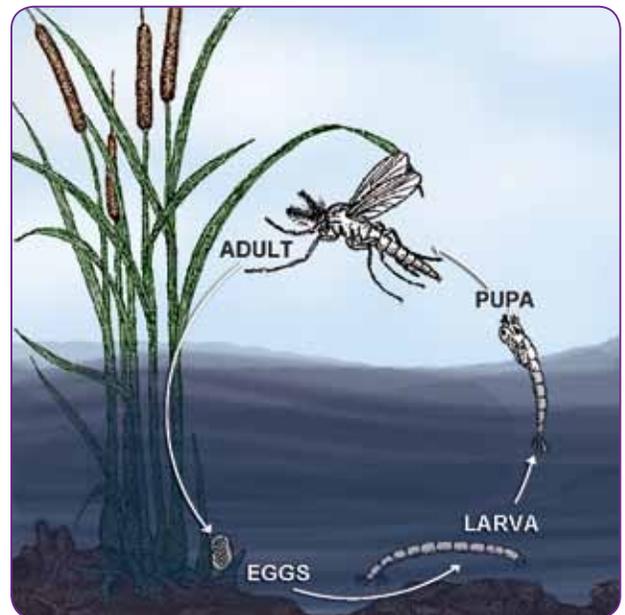


Figure 2. Locations of sediment collection for midge fly sampling and location of water quality analysis.

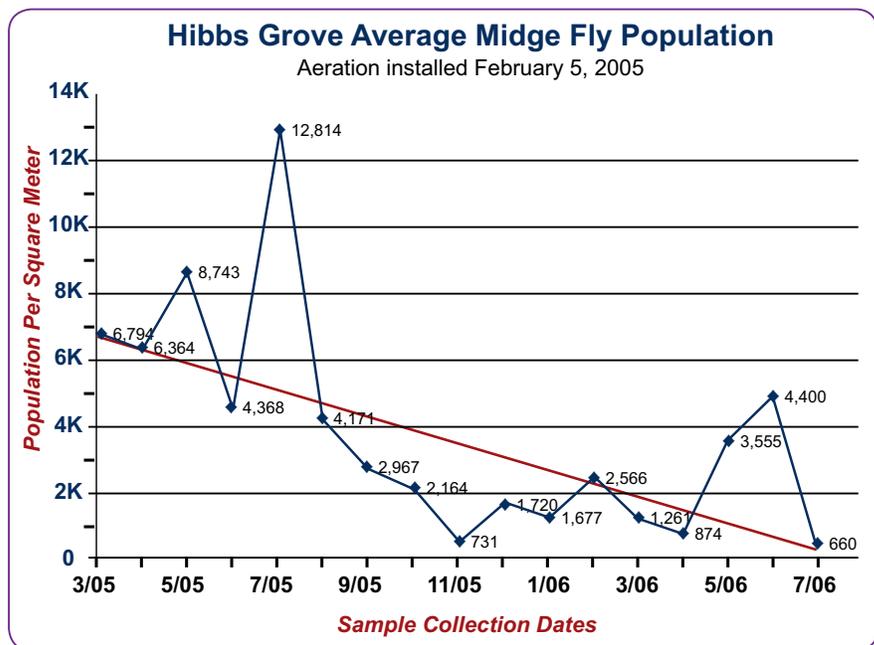


Life-cycle of a midge fly

counted and the totals for each individual sample were recorded. Both larvae and adults were preserved and sent to John Epler, an Aquatic Entomologist, for confirmation of correct identification of the subfamily, genus and species.

Results:

Midge Fly Survey: The initial sampling data indicated an extreme infestation of midge larvae inhabiting Hibbs Grove averaging 6,794 larvae/ m², more than six times the recognized nuisance level. After installation of the aeration system, oxygen levels increased and the accumulated organic muck on the bottom began to decompose thereby eliminating the habitat and food source that the midge larvae depended on, ultimately decreasing the number of larvae that emerged as adult flies. The changing environment at the bottom allowed predators of the midge fly, such as fish and other aquatic insects to inhabit the area and compete with the midges for space and resources. Both the increased predation and competition contributed to the decrease in midge fly numbers.



Conclusion:

Within 16 months of the CoActive Air 5 system installation in February 2005, the midge fly larvae population had been reduced by 90 percent, from 6,794 larvae to just 660 larvae per square meter. Throughout the year, there had been a visible increase in dragonflies and beetles both of which are natural predators of the midge fly larvae.

With continued aeration, the oxygen levels are expected to remain elevated and continue breaking down the bottom muck and maintaining an environment advantageous for midge predators and competitive species thereby keeping the midge fly population in check.

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