



MASKED HUNTER

Reduvius personatus (L.)

Order: Hemiptera; Family: Reduviidae

The masked hunter, also called the masked bed bug hunter, is thought to have originated in Europe, and was accidentally introduced into the United States. It is currently found in most states in the eastern and central parts of the country, surviving indoors in northern, colder latitudes. In warmer parts of the southern United States it can survive outside, preferring dry locations such as under overpasses of divided highways where it can feed on those bugs that are associated with pigeons and bats.

DESCRIPTION

The adult (Fig. 1) size ranges from 17–22 mm (0.686–0.875 inches) in length and appears elongate, black or very dark brown color, and somewhat glossy overall. The head is relatively small, ovoid with wide-set eyes and a recognizable “neck”. The thorax is darker and shinier than the rest of the body. It also has two noticeable protuberances or nubs on the dorsal surface. The wings are held horizontally over the abdomen, have a leathery appearance, and the posterior two-thirds overlap. Upright hairs sparsely cover the body and appendages.



Photo by Steve Jacobs, PSU Entomology
 Figure 1. Adult masked hunter.

The immature bugs (Fig. 2) are typically lighter in color than the adults, owing to their thinner cuticles and their predilection to covering themselves with dust, lint, bits of insect exoskeleton, and various other small items. The materials are glued to the nymph by a sticky, cuticular excretion.



Figure 2. Immature masked hunter.

Both the adults and nymphs have short, three-segmented, thickened mouthparts (Fig. 3) used to pierce their prey. The mouthparts are curved down and backwards, and when not in use are tucked into a groove between the front pair of legs.

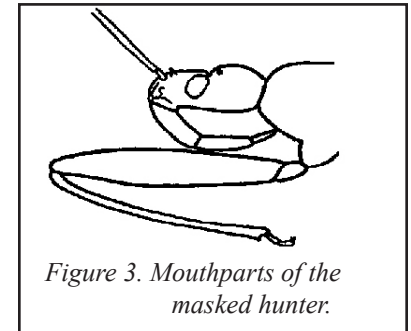


Figure 3. Mouthparts of the masked hunter.

LIFE HISTORY/BEHAVIOR/IMPORTANCE

In Pennsylvania, the masked hunter lives in structures and feeds on species of bed bugs, carpet and hide beetle larvae, and a wide variety of overwintering insects in addition to other house-infesting arthropods. The masked hunters are nocturnal feeders spending the daylight hours in protected, dry locations such as under heat registers, under cabinets and cupboards, and inside wall voids and attics. There is normally one generation per year.

Some might consider the presence of the masked hunter, preying on other critters and reducing their numbers, as a positive household addition. They would be wrong. The masked hunter is not a reliable method of elimination for these other unwanted guests.

Furthermore, and by most accounts, the masked hunter will readily bite when mishandled or trapped between clothing and skin. The bite is described as being very painful. In 1899, USDA entomologist L. O. Howard described it thusly:

“This species is remarkable for the intense pain caused by its bite. I do not know whether it ever willingly plunges its rostrum (mouthpart) into any person, but when caught or unskillfully handled it always stings (pierces). In this case the pain is almost equal to that of the bite of a snake, and the swelling and irritation which result from it will sometimes last for a week. In very weak and irritable constitutions it may even prove fatal.”

MANAGEMENT

As previously mentioned, the masked hunter is an indication of some other arthropod presence. It is advisable to ascertain the type of arthropod and institute measures to reduce or eliminate them.

Sprays of synthetic pyrethroid insecticides registered for use in homes can be of some value in controlling large populations of masked hunters. Fortunately, rarely are sufficient numbers of masked hunters encountered to warrant control. If you believe you have multiple masked hunters, consult with a licensed pest control company for treatment.

WARNING

Pesticides are poisonous. Read and follow the label directions and safety precautions. Handle them carefully and store in original, labeled containers—out of the reach of children, pets, and livestock. Dispose of empty containers quickly, in a safe manner and place. Do not contaminate forage, streams, or ponds.

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