

Peter Jovanovich 2012-08-20 15:14

FYI. Mr. Tartaglione's assertions are unscientific bunk. All over America, the mosquito population has increased because of the mild winter last year. No, Hen Island is not responsible for the outbreaks of the virus across the U.S. -- warm weather is, according to the CDC.

Blessedly, Westchester County has not yet (fingers crossed) seen a case yet. Most of the cases are in Texas.

Mosquitoes breed in any standing water; low-lying areas that flood on occasion, brackish water, tire tracks, flowerpots, roof gutters, swamps, etc. Rye, because of its proximity to many wetlands -- protected by Federal, State, County, and local law --, naturally is a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Mosquitoes tend to live in a limited range of territory (about 300 yards from their hatch according to the CDC.) The notion that Hen Island is the source of all or even most of the mosquitoes around Rye is ludicrous. Nor, for that matter, is the Nature Center a cause of concern. Note: Mosquitoes prefer not to lay eggs where predators like salamanders, frogs, toads, and dragonflies are prevalent, such as the vernal pools at the Nature Center.

The County has not issued an alert because they do not believe the activity in Rye is abnormal. "Every summer," to quote the County Health Inspector, "we find traces of West Nile Virus." When the County believes that an outbreak of West Nile requires extreme caution, they will tell us. (Here's an example of extreme caution. When I lived in Florida, there was an encephalitis outbreak. As a precaution, the County cancelled Halloween trick or treating.)

The County Health Department does not recommend extreme caution as yet. Rather, they have issued the same guidelines they issue every year: be careful around dusk, wear anti-mosquito repellent, empty containers of water around your house, wear long sleeves if there is significant mosquito activity, and so on. If, the County decides that the risk is heightened, they will tell us.

I have spoken directly to the County Health Department, and researched the advisories put out by the CDC and other health bodies. The County does not advise "shutting down Hen Island," as Ray Tartaglione, or his representative, suggested recently. In fact, Hen Island received this year a relatively good report from the County. Aside from a few exposed cisterns, there were none of the man-made common sources of mosquito breeding: open containers, children's toys on the ground, children pools, etc.

As I walk around Rye, I see many instances of practices that encourage mosquito proliferation: flower pots filled with water, children's wading pools left out over night with water in them, tire ruts at construction sites filled with standing water, depressions in the City roads where water lies for days at a time (see the Boat Basin and Elm Place) and so on. It's evident that Hen Island and the Nature Center may be making the best effort, throughout Rye, to control the growth of mosquitoes. Rather than censure, they deserve praise.