

Masked Hunter

General Information:

The masked hunter is part of a large group of insects known as assassin bugs. In general, assassin bugs are beneficial, predatory insects. While any assassin bug can bite if mishandled, masked hunters are frequently found indoors and occasionally bite people even if unprovoked. Masked hunters get their name from the habit of the immatures camouflaging, or masking themselves with dirt and debris from the environment.

What do they look like?

In general, the adult masked hunter is 17-22 mm (0.7-0.9 inch) in length, and is dark brown to black with a thin, slender body (Fig. 1). The nymphs maintain a different appearance by covering themselves in dirt, dust, and other debris to assist in protection from predators (Fig 2.).

Life Cycle

Eggs of masked hunters are laid singly or in clusters and hatch within 8 to 30 days. The young nymphs pass through five immature stages before becoming a winged adult. Developmental times depend on the availability of food and temperature, but one generation per year is normal.

Bloodsucking Relatives

The masked hunter has a bloodsucking relative named the "conenose bug." Its bite, although painless, could cause an allergic reaction in humans or possibly transmit Chagas disease in certain states. There are no reported cases of Chagas disease originating in Utah.

Did You Know?

- The pain from a bite of a masked hunter is equated to that of a wasp or bee sting.
- Masked hunters are nocturnal.
- Bat bugs, swallow bugs, and bed bugs are reportedly favored meals for the masked hunter.
- The masked hunter does not transmit disease; however, a related assassin bug, the "conenose bug," does in some southern U.S. states and southward.
- The masked hunter is not a reliable biocontrol of other bugs.

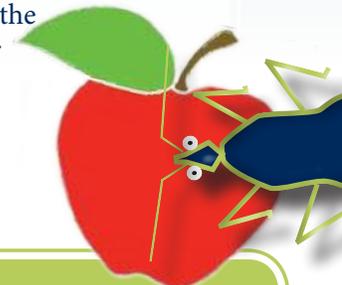


Above:

Figure 1. Winged adult masked hunter (Bug-woodWiki).

Right:

Figure 2. Masked hunter nymph covered with debris (Chap Chiswick, Wikimedia Commons).



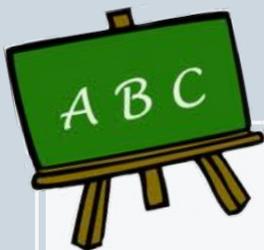


Above:
Figure 3. Visual Comparison: masked hunter on left (rounded “head”); conenose bug on right (pointed “head”).

Sometimes people are concerned they may have contracted Chagas disease after being bitten by the masked hunter. Chagas disease, also called American trypanosomiasis, is a parasite (*Trypanosoma cruzi*) spread through the feces of a group of blood-feeding assassin bugs known as “kissing bugs.” Masked hunters are not true kissing bugs, nor are they true blood feeders. Masked Hunters do not harbor or spread Chagas disease.

Few cases of Chagas have been reported in the U.S. Reports exist from southern states such as Texas, Louisiana, southern California, and Tennessee.

The kissing bug and the assassin bug have slight physical differences. The head and mouthparts of the masked hunter are generally more rounded, while the conenose bug has a slightly longer head/mouthparts forming a pointed end, or “conenose.” Conenose bugs are more commonly encountered in southern Utah counties, but are distributed throughout Utah. Masked hunters are most commonly encountered in garages, dirty closets, boiler rooms, and other dirty, dusty habitats.



Managing Masked Hunters with Integrated Pest Management

Masked hunters rarely occur in sufficient numbers to warrant control. If large numbers exist it is most likely a result of a large insect population that is sustaining the masked hunter. Exclusion and cleaning are excellent tools to manage the presence of masked hunters. Since masked hunters are solitary and somewhat nomadic, chemical treatment isn't recommended.

- **Monitor**
 - Examine sticky/monitoring traps every few weeks for masked hunters and other pests.
- **Physical**
 - Frequently clean untouched corners of rooms, closets, and other areas where they develop.
 - Limit clutter or areas where the masked hunter can hide in the day.
 - Eliminate other insects that would be possible food sources for the masked hunter.
 - Change exterior lighting to sodium light bulbs.
 - Vacuum/sweep often to clean-up masked hunters and insects that may serve as their food.
- **Exclusion**
 - Caulk or seal entry points into a building in areas where masked hunters are an issue.
- **Chemical**
 - Not recommended.

For more info, check out:

Utah State Univ.: Masked Hunters
<http://utahpests.usu.edu/files/uploads/UtahPests-Newsletter-summer13-2.pdf>

UC Davis: Conenose Bugs
<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7455.html>

University of Arizona: Conenose Bugs
<http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/insects/az1109.pdf>

