

Masked Hunter

The masked hunter is part of a large group of insects known as assassin bugs. In general, assassin bugs are beneficial, predatory insects. Although the masked hunter can be found outdoors, it is almost always encountered with homes or outbuilding.

Mased hunters are commonly found in garages, closets, boiler rooms and other dusty places. While any assassin bug can bite if mishandled, masked hunters occasionally bite people even if unprovoked.

What do they look like?

The adult masked hunter is 17-22 mm (0.7-0.9 inches) in length, and is dark brown to black with a thin, slender body (Fig. 1). The immatures (nymphs) are gray-brown and mask themselves in dirt, dust and other debris. This helps to protect them from predators and to hunt by ambush (Fig 2.).

Life History

Eggs of masked hunters are laid singly or in clusters and hatch within 8-30 days. There is usually one generation per year. Masked hunters are predators of other insects, which they impale and paralyze with piercing mouthparts.

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 Colorado.

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, swallow, and bed bugs are reportedly favored meals for the masked hunter.
- The masked hunter is not a reliable biocontrol of other bugs.



Above:
Figure 1. Winged adult Masked Hunter (BugwoodWiki).

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”).



Managing Masked Hunters With Integrated Pest Management

Masked hunters rarely occur in sufficient numbers to warrant control. Practical methods of 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**
 - Limit clutter or areas where the masked hunter can hide in the day.
 - Eliminate other insects that'd 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 food.
- **Exclusion**
 - Caulk or seal entry points into a building.

CHAGAS DISEASE, is caused by a parasite (*Trypanosoma cruzi*) that is 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 from 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 occasionally encountered in southwestern Colorado.



For more info. check out:

Colorado State Univ.: Masked Hunters
<http://bspm.agsci.colostate.edu/files/2013/03/Masked-Hunter.pdf>

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>

