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Flies and Arrow Arum  
By Jane Morton Galetto

Okay, you are annoyingly poised to “take-out” one of the most bothersome of creatures: a fly. We can’t blame you. But their stories can show you that they have many benefits. There are countless species of flies.

The common housefly lays its larva on dead carcasses and garbage. These maggots are the tiny buzzards of the insect world, devouring the decaying matter that would otherwise foul the planet.

Eerily enough their larva has been employed, since antiquity, by medical professionals to help to heal or clean difficult wounds. Today this therapy is known as biodebridement or biosurgery. Records show that Mayan Indians, Australian Aboriginals, American Civil War physicians, and modern medical professionals using flies for the healing of wounds. In fact in 2004 the FDA approved Dr. Ronald Sherman’s “medical maggots” for market use. “Medical maggots” remove dead tissue from the wound and promote a faster healing process.

Some flies play an important role in pollination. In the marshes of the Maurice River a broad-leafed plant called arrow arum or Tuckahoe is an abundant species. Indians supposedly called it duck potato and had a method for eating its roots. This spade-shaped plant is dependent on a fly for pollination. And in a relationship commonly referred to as mutualism the fly transmits a rust fungus to the plant. The fungus emits a floral scent that the fly feeds upon. The fungus provides a snack for the fly before the blossom opens. Thus the fly gets a meal and the plant gets pollinated.

Why care? Well the arrow arum is one of the plants with roots that hold the substrate of the marsh plain together in a mat. In turn the marsh protects the upland in times of high water events and absorbs storm water run off. The plant removes toxins from the waters that replenish our aquifer. Even heavy metals are transformed. The marsh protects prized upland from erosion.

Imagine that, all this from a little fly.

So the next time one species of fly or another is out in full force and the most numerous uninvited guest at your family picnic, at least pause a moment and give proper reverence for the good they do before you lower the boom.