

What makes mosquitoes so dangerous? Despite their innocuous-sounding name—Spanish for “little fly”—they carry devastating diseases. The worst is malaria, which kills more than 600,000 people every year; another 200 million cases incapacitate people for days at a time. It threatens half of the world’s population and causes billions of dollars in lost productivity annually. Other mosquito-borne diseases include dengue fever, yellow fever, and encephalitis.

There are more than 2,500 species of mosquito, and mosquitoes are found in every region of the world except Antarctica. During the peak breeding seasons, they outnumber every other animal on Earth, except termites and ants. They were responsible for tens of thousands of deaths during the construction of the Panama Canal. And they affect population patterns on a grand scale: In many malarial zones, the disease drives people inland and away from the coast, where the climate is more welcoming to mosquitoes.

Considering their impact, you might expect mosquitoes to get more attention than they do. Sharks kill fewer than a dozen people every year and in the U.S. they get a week dedicated to them on TV every year. Mosquitoes kill 50,000 times

as many people, but if there’s a TV channel that features Mosquito Week, I haven’t heard about it.

That’s why we’re having Mosquito Week on the Gates Notes.

Everything I’m posting this week is dedicated to this deadly creature. You can learn about my recent trip to Indonesia to see an ingenious way to combat dengue fever by inoculating not people, but mosquitoes. (Somehow this story involved me offering up my bare arm to a cage full of hungry mosquitoes so they could feed on my blood.) You can read a harrowing account of what it’s like to have malaria and hear from an inspiring Tanzanian scientist who’s fighting it. And I’ve shared a few thoughts from Melinda’s and my recent trip to Cambodia, where I saw some fascinating work that could point the way to eradicating malaria, which would be one of the greatest accomplishments in health ever.

I hope you’ll have a look around. I can’t promise that *Anopheles gambiae* will be quite as exciting as hammerheads and Great Whites. But maybe you’ll come away with a new appreciation for these flying masters of mayhem.

<https://www.gatesnotes.com/Health/Most-Lethal-Animal-Mosquito-Week>