

# Much Ado About Ticks



DR DOUGLAS B. JONES

MARION, ILL.

**A**sk anybody that has been bitten by a tick, they are the scourge of mankind. It usually goes something like this. I was outside in the park, woods, field, etc. Later that night, I started to itch in one of the softer regions of my body and

went to scratch it. There was this odd thing there stuck to my skin. Suddenly I realized that it was a tick; shudder and revulsion ensued. Then I removed it and it continued to itch and irritate me for the next couple of weeks.

Ticks are odd creatures. They are arthropods like insects, but have a number of features that separate them from insects. Tick typically have eight legs, insects have only six. However the first life stage of a tick has six legs. Ticks never have wings and do not have antennae. What ticks do have is an insatiable need to feed on blood and that is what makes them so dangerous to us.

Contrary to popular belief there is no real tick season. Rather there are times of the year when we are more likely to be outside in the tick's habitat and because of that we are more likely to be bitten. There are two main types of ticks in the Midwest; the soft ticks and hard ticks. Soft ticks are single host ticks that typically attack the ear canal of mammals. People are rarely affected by these ticks. The hard ticks are typically three host ticks. This means that they must feed on three separate hosts to complete their life cycle.

A typical life cycle goes like this: eggs hatch, the tick larvae (usually with only six legs) crawl up grass, weeds, etc. and hold their front legs up in the air in order to grab onto anything that passes by (questing). Once on the animal, they feed for a little while and then drop off the animal and molt into the next life stage (nymph). They now quest for another host, feed and then drop off again to molt into the adult stage. Finally, they quest for the last host animal. Once aboard, the female begins to feed and the male seeks the female. The female will only become heavily engorged with blood (replete) after she is

mated. Once she is mated and fully replete, she drops off, lays her eggs and dies to complete the cycle.

What makes ticks so dangerous to people is not that they feed on us, rather that they can transmit a number of diseases. Most of us are familiar with tick borne diseases such as Lyme disease and possibly Rocky Mountain spotted fever. However there are a number of other diseases that ticks can transmit including tick fever, tularemia, relapsing fever, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, meningoencephalitis, anaplasmosis, southern tick associated rash illness (STARI), and tick paralysis.

Keep in mind that ticks do not transmit diseases from mother to egg. This means that a tick must feed on an infected host before it can transmit most tick associated diseases. However, conceivably, tick paralysis could be caused by any life stage since it is not caused by a virus, bacteria or protozoan, but by factors in the tick saliva.

So what can you do to protect yourself from ticks? Wear long-sleeve clothing with tight fitting cuffs.

Liberally apply tick repellents that contain DEET. Application of permethrin based repellents to your clothing also works well, but do not apply these directly to your skin. Check yourself for ticks when you get home. Tick control around the farm can be as simple as keeping guinea fowl. As few as two birds can clear up to two acres of ticks in a year.

If you find a tick attached to your body, carefully remove it by grasping the tick as close to your skin as possible with tweezers and gently put pulling pressure on it until it relaxes its mouthparts and comes out whole. Pulling too quickly or hard can complicate things by leaving the tick's mouthparts in your skin. It usually takes 12 to 24 hours of feeding before an infected tick can transmit a disease to you. See a physician as soon as possible if you start experiencing high fevers, unexplained rashes or a pounding headache after being bitten by any tick. These symptoms are common to all of the tick borne diseases.  $\Delta$

DR. DOUGLAS B. JONES: *Extension Specialist, Integrated Pest Management, University of Illinois*



Link Directly To: **AGRIGOLD**



Link Directly To: **PIONEER**