



## Tree Damage Alert No 139

4th Aug 2010

### Tick Time

Over recent days I have removed four sheep/deer ticks (*Ixodes ricinus*) - one on my arm, one on my chest and one on each leg – that was from being in my Hampshire garden! This suggests that tick populations are high this year, probably a result of the recent hot weather.

Ticks suck blood from mammals, including man. They often carry the bacterium *Borrelia* that causes Lyme disease or Lyme borreliosis which is injected into the host's blood stream.

If the early symptoms of infection in man are not identified, the disease can, over many years, cause serious complications including arthritis in the large joints, viral-like meningitis, pain and neurological problems. Early symptoms may be like those of flue, including tiredness, muscle pain and weakness, headache and may therefore be unnoticed. The oft-mentioned diagnostic circular skin rash around a bite can be missed or it may not occur.

The probability of contracting Lyme disease is not known, because either not everybody who involuntarily donates blood to a tick experiences symptoms or not all ticks carry the bacterium.

Because of uncertainties surrounding possible infection it is best to avoid, as far as possible, being bitten by ticks. When walking through tall vegetation (e.g. grass, bracken and shrubs), even in urban areas, during April to October, when ticks are active, precautions should be observed. Trousers should be stuffed firmly into socks – skirts, kilts and shorts are not a good idea. Show as little exposed skin as possible - wear long sleeved shirts with collars and cuffs buttoned up and a hat. Use of an insect repellent is recommended as an additional barrier.

Ticks can sometimes find a way around/through these barriers. Therefore a body search is essential after any 'foray in the grass' be it for tree inspection or tree work. Thoroughly inspect those difficult to see areas e.g. behind the knee, under the arms, in the navel, groin or hairline.

When ticks are found on the body there are certain do's and don'ts to be observed:

Use a tick-removing tool as per the instructions - buy one now and carry it with you always. The O'Tom Tick Twister works well (available from [www.bada-uk.org](http://www.bada-uk.org) - £4.99, a pack of two (one for adult-sized ticks and a smaller one for larvae or nymph ticks));  
If no tool is available or the tick is too small for the tool, a pair of fine pointed tweezers is the best alternative. Grasp the tick's head as close to the skin as possible and pull firmly upwards and out;  
If neither tool nor tweezers are available a noose of cotton around the tick's head should suffice; and  
Once a tick is removed use an antiseptic to cleanse the site of the bite and wash the tool/tweezers and hands with antiseptic.

It is a good idea to save, in a container, any tick removed so that it can be given to a doctor if disease symptoms appear subsequently.

It is important, for obvious reasons, that fluid does not pass from the tick into your body so:

Do not remove a tick with the finger nails, chemicals including alcohol or by burning with a cigarette; and  
Do not squeeze or twist the body of an attached tick.

It is also important to remove the tick completely, but however careful you are the head will, on occasions, detach and remain embedded in your flesh. Spread magnesium sulphate paste, a drawing paste, over the area and cover it with a clean dressing or sticking plaster. Within 24 hours the wound should be clean, but if the head has not come out the treatment should be repeated, but as always before use read the instructions on the container.

Finally, remember there is no reliable test for Lyme disease so it is important not to ignore any symptoms of the disease. Early diagnosis and treatment is essential to prevent more serious conditions developing.

This is an apparently good year for Ticks. Early recognition and treatment of Tick bites is recommended to avoid long term personal health problems developing.

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This is one of an occasional series of Tree Damage Alerts produced for the benefit of the arboricultural profession and issued by the Arboricultural Advisory and Information Service.

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