

## Is There a New Tick Threat for Kansas?

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you were to take a poll of what insects (maybe we'd better say arthropods to be more accurate) people really didn't like, I'm sure that ticks would be in the top five if not the top three. Anything that can potentially bite and suck our blood isn't really on anyone's favorites list! While there are four or five tick species that we most often encounter in Kansas, there are even more species than that, it's just we don't encounter them regularly or they just aren't a potential threat to feed on you and me.

Recently, as in the past year, there has been quite a bit of discussion in the popular press about a new tick threat in the US. The longhorned tick (also known as East Asian tick, *Haemaphysalis longicornis*) was confirmed in the US from a sheep farm in New Jersey in November 2017. During 2018 specimens were also confirmed in Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Arkansas. The Arkansas detection caught a lot of us off guard. All the other states are understandable given the proximity to New Jersey, but Arkansas was a bit of a jump.

In many of the earlier cases in the eastern states there was no known direct connection between the locations where the ticks were found. Specifically, livestock was not moved from one location to the other. Wildlife could have moved the ticks, or perhaps the ticks were simply moving in some other way. Longhorned ticks are small, somewhere between deer ticks and dog ticks in size. Most people aren't going to pay close attention to a tick other than to get it off them or their pet as soon as possible. There's no way to know how long the species has been in the United States. As is often the case when a new species shows up in a country, the first detection is often an accident. After that people simply become more aware and start looking for it. It is somewhat distinctive in having long front legs which gives it the "longhorned" look that it is named for.

Here's the thing to remember about ticks. They don't fly, all they can do is crawl. Their natural dispersal rate is not very fast. So they are likely moving on animals (livestock or pets) or on people or even vehicles or wildlife. Just going out on a limb here, if we don't find them in Kansas in 2019, we will in 2020. In the US the tick has so far most commonly been found on livestock. In its native range, China, Japan, and Australia, it is known to feed on humans and like virtually all ticks, it can vector numerous tick-borne diseases.

When we start talking about ticks many people go into panic mode. Yes, ticks can carry diseases. Some of these diseases can be serious if not fatal. But mosquitoes are in that same category and people seem far less concerned about them! We don't yet know what diseases this longhorned tick might carry. Diseases tend to be localized and a tick has to acquire a disease organism from something before it can pass it on to another host. I think it is safe to say that any of the known diseases that ticks vector may possibly be vectored by the longhorn tick. Time will tell.

It doesn't matter if it is mosquitoes, ticks or chiggers, your first line of defense is self defense. Use insect repellents. Take showers soon after coming in from outside. Check yourself and your children over for ticks when you come in from outside recreation in warmer weather. Eliminate standing water so mosquitoes can't breed. Massive spraying of insecticides around your yard doesn't do much good, so focus on personal self defense from arthropods. We know they are out there, so we're just going to take steps to protect ourselves from them!