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Blood sucking locals ...

James Elliott BVetMed MRCVS CertVR, Principal at Midforest Vets writes

Visitors to the New Forest can be assured of a warm welcome, especially from a particular inhabitant who really likes to get under your skin. The tick is a delightful creature that sucks blood and it's not too fussy about whose blood. If that's not bad enough, a few of them carry Lyme's disease that can cause disease in dogs and humans.

Ticks start life as tiny 6 legged nymphs called 'seed ticks' that climb to the top of foliage to await their hapless victim to brush by whereupon they jump on and with a hypodermic-needle like mouth draw a small amount of blood. Then they drop off and hide away somewhere dark and damp and for the rest of the year grow into the lentil size next stage.

The following year, the eight legged '2nd year tick' is ready to go again, feeds once and drops off and for the rest of the year grows into the mature adult.

In the third year, the adult feeds just one more time inflating to the size of a pea, drops off, lays eggs and dies! (was it really worth the trouble I hear you ask!) Ticks vary in colour according to species from pale cream through to brick red and dark blue.

If a tick is found on a pet then the best method of removing it is with a special 'tick hook' removing tool. The secret to successful removal is to twist the tick and not pull, the tick hook makes this much easier. Forget burning them off with cigarettes Humphrey Bogart style and whisky is only useful to toast your success afterwards.

Prevention is better than cure and ticks can be discouraged from latching on to pets by a range of products available from your veterinary surgeon. As a foot note, the signs of Lyme's disease to watch out for in humans are a red spot that develops at the bite site weeks afterwards and spreads to become a large red patch followed by flu like symptoms. Lyme's disease can be serious so seek medical attention as soon as you suspect a problem.

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