

Park life and its hidden hazards

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(Medical Xpress)—Ticks may be common in parks in and around our cities where they pose a risk for humans and their pets, new research from the University of Bristol has found.

Ticks are common blood-sucking parasites that have an irritating bite and can spread [disease pathogens](#) as they feed. They become particularly active in Spring and early Summer.

Tick numbers and the incidence of [tick](#)-borne disease (such as Lyme Disease) are thought to have increased substantially over the last 10-20 years. Changes in climate ([warmer winters](#) and wetter summers),

changes in habitat management, and changes in the abundance of hosts such as deer, may all be partially to blame.

The study undertaken at the University of Bristol recorded the rate at which [dogs](#) that were brought to an intensively used park just outside the city, picked up ticks. The research first looked at the numbers of ticks in different types of habitat in the park over the course of a year. Then the pattern of pet dog movement was mapped by attaching GPS recorders to the collars of the dogs, allowing their walking routes to be tracked on a computer. Information about each dog and how often it was bitten by ticks was obtained from the dog's owner.

The study found that most ticks were present in the wooded and rough grass areas of the park, particularly where deer were present. Tick infestation was surprisingly frequent with some dogs being bitten 4-5 times per week. The risk of being bitten was primarily related to how often they visited the park.

The researchers suggest that pet dogs can act as sentinels and give a useful indication of the likely risk for humans. The study concluded that exposure to biting ticks may be unexpectedly high and people need to become more aware of the potential risks – even in what would seem to be relatively innocuous habitats such as the local park.

Professor Richard Wall, who led the study, said: "These green spaces that are heavily used by people and pets can funnel all the ingredients together to create high risk of tick infestation. It is important that people are aware of these risks and check regularly for ticks if they visit tick infested areas and, if bitten, remove any tick rapidly."

More information: "Tick infestation risk for dogs in a peri-urban park." by Jennett, A.L., Smith, F.D. & Wall. *Parasites and Vectors*, 6:358. [DOI: 10.1186/10.1186/1756-3305-6-358](https://doi.org/10.1186/10.1186/1756-3305-6-358)

Provided by University of Bristol

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