



## **FIELDWORKERS - A CAUTIONARY TALE!**

*The below was sent from a Health & Safety Advisor to all staff in Forest Research*

Do ticks find you palatable?

Some people are very attractive to sheep ticks (common on deer in forests) and some are not. I am one of the unlucky ones, and frequently pick up a few ticks on clothing when walking through woodland.

Last year my fieldwork was limited to little more than an hour or so once a week in part of Alice Holt Forest close to the Lodge. Ticks are prevalent there, and I've picked feeding ticks from my skin with needlepoint forceps on a number of occasions, despite wearing Wellingtons.

One day in July I noticed a circular dark red rash on my lower leg about 5cm diameter - no discomfort, no itching, no 'flue-like' symptoms, and no tick. This was noticed about a week after the most recent possible exposure. I visited my GP the next day and said I suspected Lyme Disease; he agreed, took a blood sample, and immediately started me on a two-week course of antibiotics. The positive blood result came back ten days later.

I suppose I'm lucky in that the conspicuous circular rash appeared. It's by no means universal and in the absence of any other symptoms could have gone untreated, with a plethora of very serious secondary symptoms appearing months or even years later. Caught in the initial stage, Lyme Disease is easily treatable.

I don't think that clothing has a significant effect on tick establishment - once they are on your clothes they will wander until they find exposed skin - usually wrists or neck. Insect repellent may help in making clothing less attractive, but ticks can attach at any height that you brush against vegetation. Raising awareness, and checking for feeding ticks in the evening following fieldwork is the best route to prevention. If feeding ticks are removed, monitor the feeding site for rash development, though it must be born in mind that a rash doesn't always develop.

The tick season is now in session again - stay vigilant!