Know Your Ticks

Ticks and the diseases they transmit pose a severe health risk to people and animals throughout Oklahoma. Identifying the species of ticks causing a problem may help guide diagnostic efforts for tick-borne diseases and is often the first step towards recommending effective control programs.

The most common tick in Oklahoma and surrounding areas is *Amblyomma americanum*, the lone star tick. Populations are usually maintained on wildlife hosts, but larval, nymphal, and adult lone star ticks readily feed on people as well as pets, horses, and livestock.

Other common species in the region include Gulf Coast ticks (*Amblyomma maculatum*), American dog ticks or wood ticks (*Dermacentor spp.*), brown dog ticks (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*), deer ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), and spinose ear ticks (*Otobius megnini*). Although the intensity varies, ticks are active in Oklahoma throughout the year.

Parasitologists at Oklahoma State University collect information on tick risk throughout the region to support veterinarians in their efforts to better understand tick problems in their patients. OADDL also offers species identification for any ticks recovered from animals. Reports include detailed information on species and stage of ticks submitted, the biology and habitat preferences of those particular ticks, and a list of diseases the ticks are known to transmit. Identification can be performed on ticks submitted dry or in alcohol.

— Dr. Susan Little

Above left: Adults of *Ixodes scapularis*, the black-legged tick or deer tick, are active in the cooler months, with peak activity usually seen in October or November each year. From left to right: male and female deer tick.

Above right: Brown dog ticks (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*) are unusual in that they will infest a home or kennel and can be found throughout the year. These ticks are also occasionally found outside around the home during the warmer months, but always in association with dogs. Left to right: female and male brown dog tick.

Left: Lone star ticks, *Amblyomma americanum*, are the most common tick removed from people or animals in the southern United States. Clockwise from top: nymph, adult female, adult male, and larva lone star ticks.