

Ticks on Dartmoor

Dr Keith Ryan gave a most interesting and informative talk to the Friends of the Wharf writers group on Monday 30 November as part of the John Taylor festival. An audience of 44 in the Wharf gallery space were entertained by the serious threat which tick bites pose to humans, livestock and pets. Ticks are small bloodsucking arthropods with many species often specific to their animal hosts but can also feed on human blood. Their bites carry the diseases Lyme borreliosis, Babesiosis and Ehrlichiosis.

LYME DISEASE

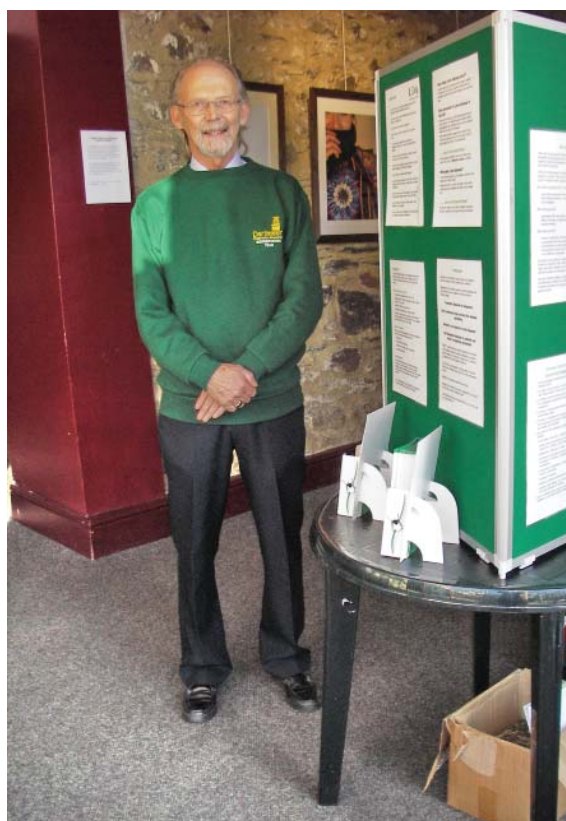
Lyme Disease is a debilitating disease caused by the bacteria *Borrelia* and early symptoms can develop within weeks of the bite. However if antibiotic treatment is given early on recognising the rash which appears after the bite the disease can be prevented. The circular rash which is clear in the centre has a bulls eye appearance and can expand and move around the body.

If the early symptoms are not recognised then serious complications can develop within weeks months or years later. These can include arthritis, stiff neck, meningitis, Bells palsy and memory problems and heart arrhythmia. Diagnosis is difficult as the symptoms can mimic other diseases.

Tick bites are not easy to recognise as they are usually painless as the ticks are tiny. Ticks can attach anywhere on the body but prefer armpits, groin, navel, neck and head and on children are often found at the hairline.

Keith, who is a member of the Dartmoor conservation team pointed out that tick bites and diseases are not limited to the open countryside like Dartmoor but can occur in city parks such as London and gardens. Keith showed his tick collecting techniques which include dragging a white woollen blanket across the moorland, often followed by cattle and ponies.

He pointed out that there is a widespread lack of knowledge and awareness in Britain regarding tick-borne diseases and a major aim of his work is to raise awareness. As Lyme Disease can be such a debilitating ongoing chronic disease that can drastically reduce the quality of life his work on the biology of ticks as vectors is highly commendable.



Dr Keith Ryan
alongside the tick information stand



The afternoon was concluded with some poems from the writers group on Animal Magic including ticks. Tea and cakes followed and the Wharf coffee shop took £100.00 in ticket sales.

The talks season has been such a success that it will continue in 2010 with Simon Dell speaking on Lydford Law and Stannary Courts.

Left: Phil Dyson entertaining the audience with a poem 'The trouble with wasps'.