

Tick alert after weather creates beastie heaven

Simon de Bruxelles

Walkers are being urged to take extra precautions against tick bites because a wet and mild winter has left vast numbers of the disease-carrying arachnids lurking in the undergrowth.

The warning was delivered by Richard Wall, Professor of Zoology at Bristol University, who estimates there are as many as 20 ticks in every square metre of woodland. Dog walkers are also being advised to check their pets thoroughly as ticks spread other diseases as well as Lyme disease.

Ticks live off the blood of birds and mammals and tend to flourish when the weather is warm and humid. Professor Wall says the number of ticks has soared in Britain over the past two decades because of a run of warmer winters and wetter summers.

Professor Wall, who heads Europe's leading centre for research into veterinary ectoparasites, said: "Ticks are most commonly found in woodland and long grass areas that are regularly used by dog walkers.

"Climate change can certainly be blamed for the increase as the warmer and damper weather provides a good environment for ticks."

Another reason for the increase is the growing number of wild deer. Ticks, like fleas, leave their host and can wait in the undergrowth for the next meal to wander by. Wild animals are also spreading the menace to parks and urban spaces. Professor Wall added:

Walkers are being told to check themselves for the eight-legged menace



"They pose a considerable threat as they pass on many diseases, such as babesiosis in dogs and Lyme disease in humans."

He urged pet owners to check their cats and dogs for fleas and ticks to ensure that their animals were free of the parasites.

Ticks can spread an array of infections, which can be fatal to both human beings and dogs. Some of the rarer illnesses passed on by the insects include Q fever, Colorado tick fever, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, African tick bite fever, tularemia, tick-borne relapsing fever, ehrlichiosis, tick paralysis, and tick-borne meningoencephalitis.

Professor Wall said: "It's important people check both their dog and themselves after a walk. Ticks are often found tucked up in creases of the body, the armpits or behind the ears. The best way to remove them is to use tweezers and put them close to the skin and press and twist them out. If people



Another reason for the increase in the tick population

around the country is the growing number of wild deer

are struggling to remove the tick they should take their pet to the vets right away."

Veterinary practices across the country are planning to take part in a campaign this summer to offer free flea and tick checks and advice.

The campaign began with an online broadcast last night that can be viewed by visiting www.mypetonline.co.uk, where pet owners can also download a voucher for the free flea check.

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making everyday more comfortable

Walk your way through a problem by taking a stroll

Rhys Blakely Los Angeles

Steve Jobs held meetings on foot, Ludwig van Beethoven created symphonies while wandering the Vienna woods, and a veritable bevy of philosophers — Nietzsche, Kant, Rousseau and Thoreau among them — held walking central to their work.

Researchers at Stanford University have confirmed that a stroll improves creative thinking and that it is the act of walking, and not the environment, that appears to be the catalyst.

A walking person was far more likely to meet challenges with creative responses than a rival who was sitting, a series of experiments found. That was the case when the sitting person was being wheeled around the picturesque Stanford University campus, in California, while the walking person was using a treadmill facing a blank wall.

"I thought walking outside would blow everything out of the water but walking on a treadmill in a small, boring room still had strong results," said Marily Oppezzo, one of the authors of the study. The research involved four experiments with 176 adults who completed tasks designed to gauge creative thinking. Three of the experiments relied on a "divergent thinking" creativity test. Participants had to think of alternate uses for a given object.

A response was considered novel if

no other participant in the group offered it. The researchers discarded ridiculous suggestions — a tyre could not be used as a wedding ring. Creative output increased by an average of 60 per cent when the person was walking.

Another test measured the ability to coin a good analogy when given a short phrase as a prompt. Walkers were twice as likely as sedentary subjects to come up with one. However, walking was not helpful for the "focused thinking" required for problems that have single, correct answers.

Participants were given three words

OH, YOU KNOW... UP AND DOWN



and had to generate the one word that could be used with all three to form compound words. For instance, given the words "cottage, Swiss and cake," the correct answer would be "cheese". Those who responded while walking performed mildly worse than those who responded while sitting. "We're not saying walking can turn you into Michelangelo," Ms Oppezzo said. "But it could help you at the beginning stages of creativity."

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