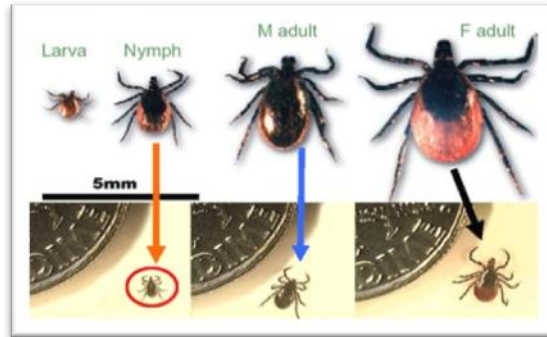


## Frequently Asked Questions about Ticks and the Norman Bird Sanctuary



**Deer Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) Size Chart**

**What is Lyme Disease?** Lyme Disease is a potentially serious bacterial infection, caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a bacterium that is carried by deer ticks. The disease affects humans and a wide range of animals including pets and livestock. It affects the skin in its early stages and spreads to the joints, nervous system, and other organ systems. Lyme is the most common arthropod-borne illness in the United States.

**Do all ticks carry Lyme Disease?** No. The two tick species which are most common in Rhode Island are the American dog tick and the deer tick (also called the black legged tick), but only the deer tick carries Lyme disease. Statistics indicate that approximately one in three deer tick nymphs (~30%) are carriers, while one in two adults (~50%) can transmit the disease. Most people are infected by the bites of immature ticks, called nymphs. Nymphs are very small (less than 2 mm) and are often very difficult to see.

**Where do ticks live? How do they get onto people?** Deer ticks are generally found in the woods, with a thick undergrowth of shrubs, small trees, and leaf litter. Ticks prefer cool, moist woodlands where they have the best chance of finding a host. They can also be found in stone walls, where one of their primary hosts, the white footed mouse, resides.

Ticks do not jump, fly, or drop from trees. They live in shrubby vegetation and wait for animals to brush by. They then grasp the animal's fur or skin and crawl up the body. Once they are on you, they will look for a place to attach, such as on your neck, waist, near your armpits, or behind your ears. Generally, ticks will wander for at least 30 to 60 minutes before they bite and attach.

**If I find a deer tick on me, does that mean that I will definitely get Lyme Disease?** No. Not all deer ticks are infected with Lyme. Adult deer ticks must be attached for an average of 48 hours to transmit the Lyme disease pathogen, while nymphs must be attached for at least 24 hours. If a tick is attached to your skin for less than 24 hours, your chance of getting Lyme disease is small – though you should still monitor your condition closely.

**What are the symptoms of Lyme Disease?** Early symptoms often mimic the flu (i.e., fatigue, headache, stiffness or pain in neck, muscles or joints, fever, or swollen glands). The most definitive early indicator is a gradually expanding circular or oval-shaped red rash (often called a "bull's eye.") This rash only develops in about 70-80% of infected individuals, however, and may be overlooked. If left untreated, later effects may include heart and neurological disorders, and arthritis.

If you experience any of these symptoms after being bitten by a tick (or having spent time in tick-infested areas), you should consult your physician immediately.

**Is Lyme Disease treatable?** Yes, for both children and adults. If diagnosed and treated early with antibiotics, Lyme disease is almost always easily cured. In its later stages, the illness can also be treated effectively, though some patients may have symptoms that linger for months or years.

**How can I prevent tick bites?** Follow simple steps such as tucking pants into long, light-colored socks, doing frequent tick checks after walking in grass or brush (and checking every night during a bath or shower), and applying repellents with Permethrin to clothes. You should also avoid stone walls and stay away from high grasses and leaf litter in your yard. While at NBS, we ask our visitors and guests to stay on designated trails and to use the “buddy system” to check for ticks.

**If I find an embedded tick, how should I remove it?** Remove ticks with tweezers only (bent, “needle-nose” tweezers are best). Do not use alcohol, nail polish, hot matches, Vaseline, or other methods to remove ticks. These techniques may actually traumatize ticks, causing them to regurgitate gut contents (which may include the Lyme disease bacterium). Wash your skin with soap and warm water.

**Is the tick problem unique to the Norman Bird Sanctuary?** No. Incidences of Lyme disease are on the rise throughout the Northeast. Unfortunately, you can pick up infected ticks in parks, playgrounds, and even in your own backyard. In fact, in a 2006 URI study, more than two thirds of Rhode Island residents were at risk for encountering a deer tick in their yards.

**What is NBS doing to address the issue?** In order to promote a dialogue on this serious issue, we will be holding a series of open houses for camp families and the general public, featuring speakers on tick ecology and disease prevention. All staff attend multiple trainings on Lyme disease and avoiding ticks. Most importantly, we strictly enforce rules during camp and school programs, such as staying on the trails, not climbing on the stone walls, and conducting frequent tick checks.

**Are my pets at risk?** Yes. Dogs and cats can also become infected with Lyme disease, and some may develop arthritis. While they cannot spread the illness directly to humans, they can bring infected ticks into your home or yard. Consult your veterinarian for preventative treatment and tick-control products.

**Should I just stay indoors this summer?** No, as long as precautions are taken, you should not stop your outdoor activities.

**Where can I find more information?** You can stop by the Norman Bird Sanctuary for additional fact sheets, tick ID cards, and tick prevention products. Other helpful websites include:

Rhode Island Department of Health - [www.health.state.ri.us/disease/communicable/lyme/index.php](http://www.health.state.ri.us/disease/communicable/lyme/index.php)  
Center for Disease Control (CDC) - <http://www.cdc.gov/lyme>  
Tick Encounter Resource Center (URI) – [www.tickencounter.org](http://www.tickencounter.org)  
The American Lyme Disease Foundation (ALDF) – [www.aldf.com](http://www.aldf.com)