

# Nature Notes



## The Wood Tick

Sections of the Kimberley Nature Park are home for one of our better adapted local parasites, the Rocky Mountain wood tick (*Dermacenter andersoni*).

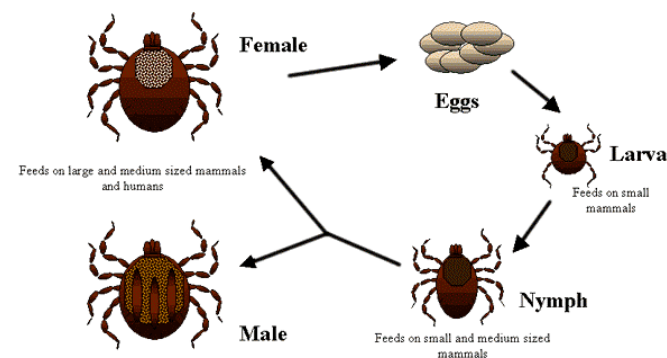


Wood ticks have eight legs, meaning they are an arachnid rather than an insect. The female is a reddish brown colour while males are a mottled grey. Both genders climb onto grass or low shrubs sometime between February and June and wait with their front two legs in the air hoping for you or some other large mammal to brush against them.

*Female left and male right. (tickinfo.com)* Should their quest succeed, they will climb up your body until they find a place to attach their mouthparts to your skin with a quick drying cement. Your little guest will quickly increase in size by ingesting your blood until it reaches the size of a raisin whereupon it lets go and drops off. Females that get a blood meal will lay a few thousand eggs within weeks, then die.

The tick requires three different hosts over a period of one to three years in order to reproduce and lay eggs. You could feel special that you are the large mammal they need as a final host. The first two hosts are rodents. Should ticks fail to find a host by June (usually they disappear after the first

really warm days), they drop to the ground and try again next season.



It is not a pleasant feeling when you find a wood tick on your skin but there is little danger provided the tick is removed promptly. Wood ticks can however make you seriously ill if not detected and removed. Rarely they can introduce the two microorganisms

responsible for Lymes disease or Spotted Fever into your bloodstream. Also, after 5 days feeding the female can secrete a toxin leading to paralysis and even the death of the host. The first symptoms of tick paralysis are numbness in the feet and legs, then the arms, and eventually difficulty swallowing and speaking. There is no known antidote for this toxin but the symptoms will subside if the tick is removed. A slow and gentle pull with tweezers is usually enough to remove attached ticks since they do not burrow under the skin.

Your best defense against ticks is prevention. Be aware during tick season, especially when walking through tall grass or shrubs along game trails. Wear long pants tucked into your socks so you can see the ticks outside your clothing before they attach. Check yourself, children, and pets often, especially around pubic areas, armpits, and the hairline at the neck.

Visit [www.kimberleynaturepark.ca](http://www.kimberleynaturepark.ca) for a hard copy or more information about Nature Park events.