

North Shore Times

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CHECKING OUT

THOMAS DUX
STORES IN LANE
COVE, CROWS
NEST TO CLOSE

THOMAS DUX
Grocer

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BACK TO SCHOOL

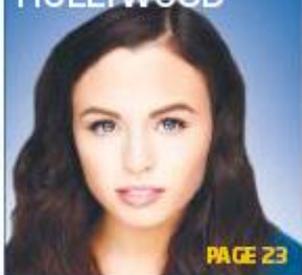
HANDY TIPS TO
MINIMISE NEW
CLASS ANXIETY



PAGES 4-5

G'DAY LA!

ST IVES ACTOR
HEADS FOR
HOLLYWOOD



PAGE 23

Dr Claire Stevens pictured with a blood-filled paralysis tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*) inset, a live tick.



TICK-ETY BOOM

Growing numbers of paralysis ticks are posing a threat to pets - and humans - on the north shore.

Read our special report - Pages 10-11



SPECIAL REPORT

Conditions are perfect for

HOMEOWNERS CAN MINIMISE THE DANGERS

Marle Hogg

ADULT tick populations are thriving in the north shore, with a wetter-than-average January and lush backyards providing ideal conditions for the paralysing pests.

Paralysis ticks, whose bites can cause serious anaphylactic reactions in humans and can be fatal to pets, mature in summer along the east coast.

"October was particularly dry and hot, so we didn't have many active then," leading entomologist Dr Stephen Doggett said.

"The season was a bit later than normal this year."

"Tick distribution and population is limited to water and the availability of hosts. We're seeing anecdotal evidence of increases in tick numbers."

Enriched habitats for native animals, who play host to the insects, could also be aiding the hotbed.

"We are doing things to support (both ticks and their hosts) like mulching and watering our gardens. The area is undoubtedly greener than it was," Dr Doggett said.

Fox-baiting practices are also believed to be behind a surge in native fauna, particularly bandicoots, the primary carrier of ticks.



North shore neighbours Simon Harvey and Aaron Wagner have started a pest control company specialising in the eradication of ticks.

Picture: ANHKA ENDERBORG

The specialist suggested methods to reduce tick numbers including animal exclusion fencing in gardens, trimming back foliage and keeping lawns mowed.

"Make it as dry as possible," he said.

Further suggestions include treating gardens with insecticide and using clothing impregnated with repellent for temporary relief.

Middle Cove fathers Simon Harvey and Aaron Wagner both despaired over tick infestations in their gardens, before developing one such treatment.

"When I came here and examined the garden... I found I had about four to five ticks on me," Mr Harvey said.

"I was horrified. I'd just

bought this house, had a young child and young puppy. I was honestly quite alarmed."

Mr Wagner said he had to ban his daughter from doing cartwheels on the lawn after she suffered repeated bites.

"I'm a keen gardener, but I'd dress up like I was an astronaut (to go outside)," he said.

The pair now run Tick Safe, an insect control service using a synthetic pyrethrum pesticide.

"We set about treating our own properties and suddenly there were no more ticks," Mr Harvey said.

"There's a misconception that there's nothing you can do about them," Mr Wagner added.



Entomologist Dr Stephen Doggett with a paralysis tick. Picture: DAVID SWIFT

Toxic species common in east

THERE are about 75 species of tick found in Australia, but the *Ixodes holocyclus*, known as the paralysis tick, is the most problematic.

The arachnid is found in adult form along Australia's east coast during wet and humid months, generally peaking in December.

The life cycle of the tick comprises four

stages and three hosts.

Larvae (or seed ticks) appear from late February to April. Nymphs (or grass ticks) appear from March to September.

Contrary to popular belief, the tick does not burrow itself into the skin. It bites, inserting a backwards barbed tube into flesh.

This "mouth" will always break off when

the tick is removed.

The toxicity comes from antigens in ticks' saliva and allergies from the "stack of proteins they pump in" when they start feeding, said Dr Stephen Doggett.

Squeezing a tick when removing it can induce or increase the allergic reaction, as the saliva glands are found in the body, not the head.

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ALLERGIC TO MEAT AFTER JUST ONE BITE

Marie Hogg

LIKE many Australians, Louise Evans loves to eat meat regularly.

But since a near-fatal tick bite just over a year ago, the pleasure of tucking into a beefsteak, or lamb cutlets, is denied to her.

The Middle Cove resident now suffers from mammalian meat allergy after experiencing a severe anaphylactic reaction to a paralysing tick bite.

She was in the front garden of her home when she was bitten in November 2014. She immediately rushed to her neighbour for assistance.

"She said it was the biggest tick she'd ever seen," Ms Evans said. "She pulled it out. I came home and started to feel sick."

Her body's response was swift; within 60 minutes she was struggling to breathe.

"It was very scary. I swelled up and turned scarlet."

Paramedics confirmed she had been bitten by a paralysis tick and she was admitted to Royal North Shore Hospital and treated for anaphylaxis. Repercussions of her allergic reaction continued, and after months of "fits and starts", lethargy



Louise Evans in the front yard of her Middle Cove home, where she was bitten by a paralysis tick in November 2014.

and nausea, she was diagnosed with mammalian meat allergy.

The allergy to red meat is a result of a tick's ability to change the immune system after a bite, according to Clinical Associate Professor Dr Sheryl Van Nunen.

The renowned allergist, from Chatswood, said Australians had one of the highest prevalences of the meat

allergy, with one in 550 people presenting symptoms.

"It would be greater than that if we surveyed people in the north shore," she said.

"It has become epidemic and so has tick anaphylaxis."

She said she knew of more than 1000 cases of MMA on the north shore alone.

"If you have more tick bites, the allergy worsens,

but if you don't have another tick bite you can improve."

Dr VanNunen said anaphylactic responses to tick bites were also alarmingly common.

Since 2011 she has treated nearly 20 times more cases of tick anaphylaxis than bees and wasps.

"75 per cent of allergic reactions of anaphylaxis to ticks are very serious episodes," she warned.

Keeping your pets tick-free

USE preventive tick products during summer and check your pets regularly – that's the advice from the Australian Veterinary Association to prevent serious harm or death.

"Dog and cat owners must be vigilant at this time of year, particularly when travelling to tick prone areas," AVA President Dr Robert Johnson said.

More than 365 cases of tick paralysis have been recorded along the east coast of NSW this month, according to Disease Watchdog.

"There are a range of preventive tick products around. For people living in tick prone areas, they should contact their local vet who can advise on the best prevention method for their situation," he said.

Paralysis ticks are most often found attached to the head and neck area of the pet, and on the chest and front legs.

"Common signs of tick paralysis include difficulty walking, gurgling and choking. Often dogs won't be able to bark properly as a result of paralysis of the throat."

If you find a tick it's vital you take action and contact your local vet for advice.

IF YOU'RE BITTEN

- Don't scratch it.
- Don't disturb it, because it could "squirt".
- Kill the tick where it is – use a freezing agent on adults or a permethrin creme on larvae and nymphs
- Wait for it to drop off – it may take one to three hours
- Do NOT remove it with household tweezers.

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