

# *Flagging for a Cause: Collecting and Testing Ticks May Help Humans Suffering with Disease*

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For the second consecutive year, Georgia Lyme Disease Association members participated in a tick-collecting field study with research scientist Dr. Kerry Clark. Hundreds of ticks were collected from various Georgia neighborhoods by flagging. Species and numbers of ticks were noted. Special emphasis was placed on collecting in areas where humans have reported developing serious illnesses following known tick bites. In most of the neighborhoods, white-tailed deer and other wildlife are commonly seen.

*Tick-borne disease researcher  
Dr. Kerry Clark and GALDA's Liz Schmitz  
carefully check a flag for ticks*

Photo credit: GALDA volunteer Windy Blair



As expected, the predominant tick found by far was the aggressive lone star, *Amblyomma americanum*. Larvae, nymphs and adults were seen in abundance both years. Relatively few black-legged “deer” ticks and “gulf coast” ticks were collected.

Many ticks were discovered lurking in well-manicured yards, beneath the shade of bushes and shrubbery and in and around playground areas of homes situated on wooded lots. Natural community recreational areas such as lakes and biking trails were also found to have a high density of ticks.



Far more ticks were found questing during the cool morning hours, in shaded areas, and in bedding such as pine straw and leaf debris. Finding ticks in the late, hot afternoon sun proved difficult due to their susceptibility to drying out and their need to maintain moisture. Pine tree forests, where needles covered the forest floor, provided excellent environmental conditions for large tick populations to thrive.

It was noted that from 2010 to 2011, the number of ticks found in the same areas increased dramatically. This may be attributed to the fact that ticks were collected during different months each year- June 2010 and May 2011. Another explanation is the explosion of the deer population in many of these neighborhoods interlaced with woods. In 2011, residents in one large community noticed a significant increase in the number of fawns, noting one doe sited with twins and another seen with triplets.

The ticks are being tested at Dr. Clark's research lab at the University of North Florida. By identifying specific pathogens found in ticks, Dr. Clark's ongoing studies are bound to help humans suffering with illness following tick bites. Watch our Georgia Lyme Disease Association website for further updates.

*Georgia Lyme Disease Association sincerely thanks Dr. Clark for his continued investigations involving tick-borne pathogens and their impact on human health.*