

NEW TICK DISEASE HITS FIRE ISLAND

By Jean Matthews, Editor

A new human affliction, dubbed Lyme disease in "honor" of the Connecticut town where it first achieved notoriety, is moving down the Eastern seaboard and causing consternation at such parks as Fire Island NS and Gateway NRA, according to personnel from both National Park areas.

The causative organism appears to be a spirochete, transmitted by *Ixodes dammini*, known as the northern deer tick. Initial sign of the disease is a red ring around the bite, differing from ordinary insect bites by a continued expansion over a period of several days — up to a foot or more in diameter. In the early stages, victims are subject to a variety of symptoms in several combinations, including headache, nausea, stiffness in the neck, and fever. Some people report arthritis-like pain in the joints, flaring and waning intermittently over several years.

Len Bobinchock, Fire Island resource management specialist, reports that science has been following the disease only since 1976, so very little is known yet about either its history or its prognosis. Bobinchock has made a study of articles appearing in medical journals and has presented his report to East Coast park personnel.

The northern deer tick hosts, in the immature (larval and nymphal) stages, on small mammals such as the white-footed mouse. In the adult stage, the tick prefers larger animals such as the white-tailed deer. Anywhere along the line of progression the tick will host on humans if they become available. From present research, it appears that both the nymphal and adult stages may transmit the disease-causing spirochete.

Several staff people at Fire Island have contracted the disease, as have many of the approximately 20,000 persons who reside in the summertime within Fire Island National Seashore. Bobinchock reports that pressure is mounting from residents who want the park "to get rid of" the deer and white-footed mice.

"We view this approach as overly drastic," Bobinchock said, adding that Supt. Jack Hauptman has been working closely with New York State Department of Health authorities, who agree that attempts to exterminate the deer and mouse carriers might well increase the likelihood of the ticks' attacking more humans.

Preventive measures are preferred at this stage, according to Bobinchock, who is following the literature and working with local health officials to find effective means for containing the disease.