

Deer tick study under way in Fairfield County

by Kent Haydock

Fairfield County Municipal Deer Management Alliance

A study is being coordinated by the Fairfield County Municipal Deer Management Alliance to examine deer tick populations in 14 Fairfield County towns.

Dr. Eva Sapi, assistant professor of biology and environmental science at the University of New Haven, will analyze both the number of ticks found in each of the participating towns and the proportion of those ticks

that carry the bacteria that cause Lyme disease.

Dr. Sapi is an expert in the collection and analysis of deer ticks. She is particularly interested in the increasingly common finding in Lyme-carrying ticks of other infectious agents such as those that cause the diseases ehrlichiosis and babesiosis.

Previous studies have reported a rise over the last few years in the percentage of ticks found in Connecticut that carry the infectious agents that cause Lyme,

ehrlichiosis and babesiosis, all of which are becoming increasingly common diseases in humans.

This will be the first systematic study of ticks across Fairfield County, which for many years has had the highest number of cases of Lyme in Connecticut. Up to nine sites will be studied in each town so that the relative number of ticks can be compared between sites. This information will help towns better understand how to protect their residents from these infections, and will

reinforce the need for vigilance in preventing tick bites. This study will also serve as a baseline for future studies of changes in tick populations that may result from various intervention programs such as land use modifications or deer management programs.

Preliminary results from tick collections in Bethel and Redding in the summer revealed hundreds to thousands of larval ticks at sites in both towns. Preliminary results of testing for the Lyme bacteria were positive, and warn-

ing signs have been posted at the affected sites by the respective town health departments.

This study meets the goals of the Fairfield County Municipal Deer Management Alliance, of which Ridgefield is a member, by continuing to educate its 15 member towns.

The alliance aims to raise awareness in the communities of southwest Connecticut of the health, safety and environmental issues relating to deer overabundance. More information is avail-

able on the alliance Web site at deeralliance.com.

This study will be funded by the participating towns, many of which are members of the alliance. Other towns in Fairfield County may still join the alliance and those in other counties may join the Connecticut Coalition to Eradicate Lyme Disease (EradicateLymeDisease.org) by contacting gsholl@optonline.net.

Any questions should be directed to Georgina Scholl MD at gsholl@optonline.net.