

3-3-10 Spring Time Reminders

Last weekend was more like May than February. With temperatures reaching close to seventy degrees and no mosquitoes yet, it was wonderful to spend time outdoors enjoying nature. Evening found me not wanting it to end, so I sat outside around a small contained cook fire and ate popcorn while looking at the stars and crescent moon. I think I saw one bat. Maybe. I'm not sure. (It is difficult to see with little contrast against the darkening sky.) I admit to looking for them because they are known to venture out of their roost for a bit of exploring on the first warm day of spring. (and this was exceptionally warm and exceptionally early) Maybe they're feeling kind of groggy after the long sleep, but that initial step out quite often brings them to unintended destinations; such as your bedroom.

If you were awake when you found the bat, you can take measures to open the windows and doors and watch your spring time visitor leave. If you discover a bat in a baby's room or you wake up to a bat in your room, then you are supposed to submit it for testing because it may carry rabies. They're teeth are so tiny, that all the literature says we may not be aware of a bite, it may not leave a visible bite mark and, of course, the baby can't tell you the story. I'll write more about bats later in the season and you can contact me for more information. In a previous year, the column receiving the most response was the two-part one on bats.

As dusk turned to darkness last Saturday, my attention was turned to sounds. My back yard isn't surrounded by open pine groves and woods meandered with trails that I used to enjoy but it has enough. So, there I was, sitting in my backyard, surrounded by trees and stars and quiet, when my quiet woods started to get noisy. It brought back memories of camping, of being little and noticing things more and being more in tune to the surroundings. Apparently, I've become so accustomed to staying indoors, that I forgot how noisy the woods become after dark. There are all kinds of rustling in the dry leaves and scrambling up and down in the trees. Animals such raccoons and fox become active in the evening and they are more likely to carry rabies than the little bats. So, enjoy the outdoors and just be aware.

After dark is a good time to keep a tight hold on your dogs, when you let them out for their last daily visit with the outdoors. Most dogs cannot help themselves when it comes to interacting with wildlife, especially after dark, when they are so enticed by sounds and smells and, just like us, they are less distracted by the sights.

This is a good time of year to appreciate that April is Rabies Awareness Month and be planning on getting your pets vaccinated. Halifax usually has its rabies vaccination clinic in April but we are considering a different approach this year. In order to assist the Animal Control Officer and the Clerk in getting the dog licenses, we are thinking about having it in June and giving the vaccine and the tags out at the same time. What do you think? Did you know that the

dog license is actually a health promotion program? It is linked with rabies vaccinations and spaying/neutering, both of which make our lives safer. Learn more at CDC's website

https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/location/usa/surveillance/human_rabies.html

It is never too early in the year to think about ticks and the many diseases they can carry, including Lyme disease. Although they love warm and humid, or even the moistness of spring, they never completely hibernate and can be found out and about and active any time it is above freezing. It is mainly the increase of outdoor human activities that causes the spike in Lyme disease in the spring. After three cases of Lyme disease myself and a prolonged period of avoiding the little blood sucking, disease carrying creatures, I've managed to make some peace with them. The peace is found in acceptance and accommodations.

I accept that they are most everywhere and that I must make some accommodations to protect myself. I can soak my socks, gloves, pants and shirts with permethrin and once it is dry, it does not enter the skin but still kills the ticks. Repellant can be sprayed on the skin but it is not very effective with ticks. (I'll write more about this in the near future.) The daily tick check, of yourself, your children and your pets is very important and, really, the key to preventing tick borne disease. After hiking, raking and gardening; bathing and showering offers the opportunity to check for ticks. If you find a moving tick, you are okay, for it just arrived and was not attached yet. If you know that you or your child did not have a tick yesterday and you find one attached today, you still are okay, for the tick requires 24 to 36 hours of attachment to transmit any blood borne disease. Timing is everything!

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Towns of Halifax and Plympton, MA. She welcomes your stories of ticks, bats, Lyme disease and all kinds of icky things. Tell her all about it at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us