

Not All Alien Invaders Are From Outer Space



Tropical bont ticks could come to this country. Heartwater and related diseases would follow, damaging the cattle industry and driving up the price of your next hamburger...

Tropical Bont Tick
Amblyomma variegatum

Tropical Bont Tick, *Amblyomma variegatum*

Tropical bont ticks were introduced onto the eastern Caribbean island of Guadeloupe in the 1800's on cattle imported from French West Africa. Since then, and particularly in recent years, the tropical bont tick has spread as far north as Puerto Rico and as far south as Barbados and St. Vincent. The reason the tick is dangerous is that it harbors organisms that cause serious diseases in cattle and wildlife.

The life cycle of *Amblyomma* ticks may take from 5 months to 4 years to complete. Thus, the disease agents may persist in the environment, inside these ticks, for a long time. The immature stages of the tick feed on a wide variety of livestock as well as wildlife (e.g., deer, ground-dwelling birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians). The ticks thus spread the infectious diseases efficiently and rapidly.

The tropical bont tick carries a particularly nasty and fatal livestock and wildlife disease called heartwater and a cattle disease called acute bovine dermatophilosis (a skin infection). These diseases are not themselves contagious but are transmitted by the ticks.



Scientists believe that much of the recent interisland spread of the tropical bont tick has occurred through movement of infested migratory birds, and in particular cattle egrets. Because these egrets can fly between the Caribbean and Florida, there is a significant chance that tropical bont ticks could come with them to this country. Heartwater and related diseases would follow, damaging the cattle industry and driving up the price of your next hamburger.

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