

Gulf Coast tick

Amblyomma maculatum

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Arachnida
Order: Ixodida
Family: Ixodidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, nonnative

FEATURES

The adult is about 0.24 inches long. The larva is approximately 0.02 inches in length, and the nymph is about 0.04 inches long. The adult male and adult female have different appearances. The shield (upper part of the flattened body) of the female is red-brown with a white, shield-shaped mark toward the anterior edge that encloses a brown mark. The male's shield is red-brown with a variety of thin, silver-white markings. The legs of both the female and male are yellow-orange. The larval stage has six legs while the nymph and adult stages have eight legs.

BEHAVIORS

This species is native to the coastal areas in the southeastern and mid-Atlantic states, but it has been expanding its range. In the past few years, it has been discovered in several counties in Illinois and has established populations in Jackson, Saline and possibly more counties. Unlike most other tick species in Illinois, the Gulf Coast tick prefers dry, hot habitats, such as prairies and roadsides. It is most active in early to middle summer. It goes through egg, larva, nymph and adult stages. It only feeds once at each stage but must have a meal of blood before it can develop to the next stage. Each life stage feeds from a different host. This animal can go for months without feeding. The adults tend to infest large- and medium-sized wildlife species. The immature stages feed on birds and small mammals. The adult dies after laying eggs. A "questing" behavior is used to find and attach to a host. The tick crawls to the top of a stem or the edge of a leaf and extends the front legs waiting for a possible host to come by. When it does, the tick hooks on with its front legs. The Gulf Coast tick may carry and transmit the bacterium *Rickettsia parkeri* that causes rickettsiosis.

ILLINOIS RANGE





Photo credit: Emily Struckhoff, INHS Medical Entomology Lab

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; edge; hill prairie