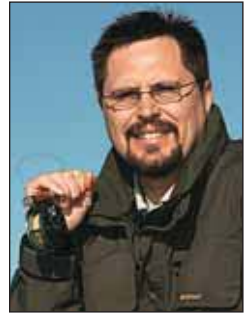


back cast

By Ron Wilson



I'm sitting on the edge of eroded shoreline with my feet dangling like a kid in a too-tall chair. I crack a hard-boiled egg I've been carrying around in my pocket all morning on a rock and immediately wish for the Tabasco sauce left sitting in the cooler.

Things are different here. The grass is taller and seemingly much greener than in recent years. And the water, which is typically in the midst of an algae bloom by this time in June, is as clear as I remember it. It's like looking through a window that has been Windexed clean for spring.

The verdant landscape and increased water levels that have covered rocks and dead trees once exposed during leaner, drier times, are certainly the result of near-record snows. In part, this is our reward after a winter we cursed for arriving uninvited in early November and then lingered too long in spring like an unwanted guest.

After a sunny morning fishing on a pretty lake rimmed in green, it seems like a fair enough trade, but I know better. Those folks who had to endure winter in order to make a living or fight bloated creeks and rivers in spring to save their homes, understandably have a different view on things.

Maybe 10 feet from shore and hugging the bottom is a fish, maybe a foot long or better, that either slipped in between daydreams or has been there the entire time passing for a rock. I'm still not accustomed to this, not used to the water

in this lake not looking like a fish tank that needs to be cleaned. I play out a little line, make a halfhearted cast with my feet still dangling and spook the fish.

Back at my pickup I break down my fly rod, peeling the camouflage Duct tape from the reel seat, promising as I did the last two seasons that I'll make the repair proper with some glue as soon as I get home. Then again, I still have plenty of tape left ...

I pick the first tick off my ankle, pinch it between thumb and finger and flick it into the gravel parking lot. The next



comes from the back of my neck, another from under the waist band on my fishing trunks, and so it goes. I strip to the point to where I won't get thrown in jail, turn my shirt inside out and find more hitchhikers. Ticks are a nuisance, more than anything else, but I know folks who'd be

freaking out right now, dancing in the parking lot as if trying to stamp out a fire.

When I think of ticks I think of bluegills, and vice versa. It's an odd jump, I admit. I get there easily enough because, like most people who've wrestled a nice bluegill on light tackle will attest, if these hard-fighting fish were, say, the size of a pizza pan, you'd find your reel spooled and knees shaking. If ticks made the same proportional leap size-wise, we'd think twice about sitting in tall grass to eat a snack or lean against a tree to call turkeys in spring.

There are four or five species of the bloodsucking arachnids in North Dakota, the most common being the American dog tick. Dr. Dan Grove, North Dakota Game and Fish Department wildlife veterinarian says ticks can kill in multiple ways. Some carry diseases and transmit them to animals. Certain species when they bite stir a reaction in their hosts, causing slow paralysis. The other is through the removal of blood.

"They suck so much blood out of an animal that the animal loses red blood cells and protein that is vital to life," he said.

We see this happen to our moose, sometimes. Greg Gullickson, Department outreach biologist in Minot, sent a photo in spring of a moose that, if the number of ticks attached were an indication, died from a loss of protein.

What a grizzly way to go. Makes picking off a dozen or so ticks after a fishing trip sound downright wimpy.

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