DIVERSITY IN TICKS (ACARI) OF WEST BENGAL

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INTRODUCTION

The ticks are a small group of acarines under the order Metastigmata or Ixodida. They occur throughout the world, but are more frequently encountered in tropical and subtropical realms. They are grouped into three families viz., Argasidae or soft ticks, Ixodidae or hard ticks and Nuttalliellidae (known only from Africa).

The ticks show morphological characters typical of other acari, but their peculiarities and greater size (2,000 μm to over 30,000 μm) clearly distinguish them from most other acarines. Besides, there are certain characters which are present and distinct throughout the ontogeny of ticks. A hypostome armed with retrose teeth serves to anchor the tick to its host. A complex sensory setal field, Haller’s organ, is located on the dorsal side of tarsus-I in all postembryonic stages, providing sites for contact or olfactory chemoreception. Other distinguishing features are: a pair of stigmata situated posterior to coxa IV or dorsal to coxa III-IV, palp with only three or four segments, chelicera 2-segmented, digits of chelicerae working in horizontal plane with their dentate faces directed externally.

The argasid ticks are non-scutate with leathery integument, sexual dimorphism slight, spiracles small and anterior to coxa-IV and pads, porose areas and festoon are absent. The ixodid ticks are scutate with terminal capitulum, sexual dimorphism well marked, spiracles posterior to coxa-IV and pads, porose areas and festoon are present.

The ticks live as ectoparasites of vertebrates and feed obligatorily on the blood of mammals, reptiles and birds. Some of them are significant pests of man and animals. In temperate and tropical countries, they surpass all other arthropods as transmitters in the number and variety of diseases of man and domestic animals. They cause paralysis and anaemia and serve as reservoir and vectors for many infective viruses, rickettsia, bacteria, sporozoans and spirochaetes. Ticks are the main vectors of Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) in man and monkeys in Karnataka state. Other arboviruses like Kaisodi, Ganjam and Bhanja have also been isolated from ticks in India. Ticks are oviparous. The life history passes through egg, larva, nymph and adult stages.

Though the study of ticks in India was initiated by Linnaeus in 1758, the first record of tick from West Bengal was done by Rudow (1870). He described an ixodid tick Amblyomma bengalense from
Python sp. But Neumann (1911) reported the species as doubtful and since then there is no record of the species.

The first record of any valid species of ixodid tick from West Bengal was made by Warburton (1910). Later, medical entomologists and acarologists got interested about ixodid tick of the state and described and recorded a good number of genera and species of ticks from the state. The detailed accounts of those studies have been summarised by Sanyal and De (1991, 1992).

**RANGE OF DIVERSITY**

The number of tick species of West Bengal (Table-I). When compared with the total number of species known from India, it is noted that West Bengal alone represents 30% of the total Indian tick fauna. The total number of taxa of ticks so far known from West Bengal is represented by 9 genera.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Genera</th>
<th>Species</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardhaman</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjiling</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hooghly</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coochbihar</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malda</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North 24-Parganas</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South 24-Parganas</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Dinajpur</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and 32 species under one family Ixodidae. There is no record of tick of the family Argasidae from the state. This may be due to lack of attention to this family by the acarologists.

While analysing the status of taxa of ticks in West Bengal, it is observed that three species of ixodid tick viz., *Hyalomma brevipunctata*, *Haemaphysalis darjeeling* and *H. ramachandrai* have been described as new to science from this state. It is also recorded that among the species so far known from West Bengal, *Boophilus microplus*, *Dermacentor auratus*, *Haemaphysalis bisponosa* and *Hyalomma anatolicum anatolicum* are most dominant in population in the state.

Table-II showing the host and distribution of ticks in the state, indicates that they have adapted themselves to live on different hosts in different areas in the state from plains to higher elevation of the Himalayas.

The Zoogeographical relationship of ticks so far known from West Bengal is shown in Figure-I. It shows that the tick species recorded from the state show maximum similarity in species composition with Palaeartic region (25%). The other regions in order of degree of similarity are Ethiopian (12.5%), Pacific (9.4%), Nearctic and Neotropical (each 6.3%). It is also noted from the figure that 62.5% of tick species found in West Bengal are known to occur only in the oriental region. The available data records that *Amblyomma supinoi* is known only from West Bengal. Table-II also shows that none of the species of tick known from West Bengal is endemic as all the species are known from outside India.

**DISTRIBUTION OF TICK FAUNA IN WEST BENGAL**

The number of genera and species of ticks in different districts of West Bengal is shown in Table-I and Figure-2. These indicate that ticks are known from all the districts in the state. They show that Darjiling district alone represents 77.8% of genera and 56.3% of species of the total genera and species of tick known from the state and the district occupies highest position among the other districts. The district Jalpaiguri occupies the second highest position (40.8%). The other districts in order of number of total species are Calcutta (34.4%), Medinipur (21.9%), North 24-Parganas and Purulia (each 18.8%), Hooghly (15.6%), Bankura and Bardhaman (each 12.6%), Birbhum, Howrah, Coochbihar, Nadia, South 24-Parganas and West Dinajpur (each 9.4%) and Malda and Murshidabad (each 6.3%).

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors express gratefulness and sincere thanks to the Director, Zoological Survey of India for extending working facilities.
Fig. 1. Zoogeographical distribution of tick species of West Bengal.
Fig. 2. District-wise distribution of ticks in West Bengal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Hosts recorded in West Bengal</th>
<th>Distributed in India and elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Amblyomma javanense</em> (Supino)</td>
<td>Manis pentadactyla, Nicoria tricarinata</td>
<td>India: Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (Calcutta, Jalpaiguri). Elsewhere: Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mayanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Amblyomma supinoi</em> Neumann</td>
<td>Testudo elongata, Geomyda spinosa</td>
<td>India: West Bengal (Jalpaiguri). Elsewhere: Myanmar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Amblyomma testudinarium</em> Koch</td>
<td>Buffalo, tiger</td>
<td>India: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Sikkim, West Bengal (North 24-Parganas, Darjiling, Jalpaiguri). Elsewhere: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mayanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Dermacentor auratus</em> Supino</td>
<td>Deer, Man</td>
<td>India: Andaman &amp; Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (Calcutta, Darjiling, Jalpaiguri, South 24-Parganas). Elsewhere: Indonesia, Mayanmar, Sri Lanka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Hosts recorded in West Bengal</td>
<td>Distributed in India and elsewhere</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Haemaphysalis cornigera shimoga</em> Trapido and Hoogstraal</td>
<td>Sambar</td>
<td>India: Kerala, Karnataka, Meghalaya, West Bengal (Jalpaiguri). Elsewhere: Sri Lanka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>Haemaphysalis darjeeling</em> Hoogstraal and Dhanda</td>
<td><em>Capricornis sumatraensis</em>, <em>Sus scrofa cristatus</em>, <em>Muntiacus muntzak vaginalis</em></td>
<td>India: Assam, Manipur, West Bengal (Darjiling). Elsewhere: Malaysia, Mayanmar, Thailand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Haemaphysalis hystricis</em> Supino</td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td>India: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (Darjiling, Jalpaiguri). Elsewhere: Japan (Okinawa Islands, Ryukyu Islands), Myanmar, Taiwan, Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Species</td>
<td>Hosts recorded in West Bengal</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>Hyalomma anatolicum anatolicum</em> Koch</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>India: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu &amp; Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (most of the districts). Elsewhere: Afghanistan, Border of Mediterranean sea, Canary Islands, East Africa, Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Southern Europe, West Asia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Hyalomma brevipunctata</em> Sharif</td>
<td>Cheeta, Sambar</td>
<td>India: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Orissa, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (Medinipur). Elsewhere: Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table-II. Contd.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
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</table>

**SUMMARY**

The study on tick fauna of West Bengal was initiated by Rudow (1870). Later many workers studied the taxonomy of ticks of the state and till date 9 genera and 32 species under the family Ixodidae are known from West Bengal. No argasid tick is known from the state. Ticks have been recorded from all the districts, in which Darjiling occupies highest position in number of species.
The tick species recorded from the state show maximum similarity in species composition with Palaearctic region (25%). *Amblyomma supinoi* is known only from West Bengal.

**REFERENCES**


