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Sarah E. Randolph

Dept. of Zoology, South Parks Road, Oxford, United Kingdom

Explanations for the dynamics of tick-borne disease systems usually focus on changes in the transmission potential in natural enzootic cycles. These are undoubtedly important, but recent analyses of data from a wide range of sources reveal that they may not be quantitatively the most significant side of the interaction between infected ticks and humans. Variation in human activities that may impact inadvertently but positively on both the enzootic cycles and the degree of human exposure to those cycles, have provided more robust consistent explanations for recent upsurges in tick-borne encephalitis in Europe. This can account for the following:

- long-term increases in incidence that coincided with post-soviet political independence in 7 of the 9 central and eastern European countries;
- short-term fluctuations such as annual spikes in incidence caused by contrasting factors, specifically those seen in 2006 in 6 western, central, and eastern European countries, and in 2009 in Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland;
- small-scale spatial variation in incidence between parishes within Latvia.

The patterns of relevant human activities, typically those related to protection against infection through habitat avoidance or vaccination, to outdoor recreation or to the use of forest resources, are evidently driven and/or constrained by the cultural and socio-economic circumstances of each population, resulting in contrasting national and local epidemiological outcomes.