

Rabies continues its advance through state

BY SALLY DUNMIRE
Staff Correspondent

HARRISBURG — Rabies continues its advance north and east through the commonwealth, with 139 cases confirmed thus far this year. Wildlife is bearing the brunt of the epidemic, with 90 affected raccoons recorded, followed by lesser number of skunks, bats and groundhogs.

With about one-half of the virus' April-through-October active season past, four cows, four cats and two dogs have also contacted the disease.

According to Dr. Robert Jones, a Pennsylvania Department of Health veterinarian, this problem "may go on forever." This year, the epidemic is centered in Adams County with 46 cases, and Cumberland, with 27. York has reported six cases; Perry, nine; Mifflin, three; Lancaster, one case. Huntington County also recorded its first confirmed rabies case last week.

Statistics indicate that the hardest hit counties of last year, Bedford, Fulton, and Franklin, have found some relief. Bedford has reported no case this year, and Fulton County had only one, a rabid cow near Warflesburg. The number of confirmed 1985 cases is also much lower in Franklin County. Dr. Jones attributes the reduction in these hard-hit areas, in part, to the "infected population dying off. Many of the wild animals, especially in the rugged mountainous and rural areas die without ever coming into contact with domestic animals or humans."

Rural residents are also accustomed to dealing with wild animals. Reports continue to circulate of scraggly, staggering raccoons wandering into farmyards and pastures during the day, where they are quickly dispatched.

"I wouldn't recommend open season on all raccoons or skunks you see during the daytime," Dr. Jones said. "The most important thing to look for is a staggering gait in a sick-looking animal." A

wild animal that has lost its fear of humans or a pet that is sick or suddenly becomes vicious should also be suspect.

"Most of these cases are going unreported," the veterinarian said. "People are just burying the sick animals without getting them tested. If the animal comes into contact with pets or people, however, it should be tested."

Any bites, scratches, or even petting, as children are prone to do, should be considered contact.

"We have never had a known case of someone contacting rabies any other way than from a bite, but theoretically, if the virus find its way beneath the skin through a wound or scratch, that person could possibly develop rabies. All cases to date have been from bites though," Dr. Jones emphasized.

One fact that Dr. Jones was quick to point out was that, as the number of cases of dog rabies has declined, so has the number of human cases. "Prior to the early 1950's, dog rabies ran between 8,000 and 9,000 cases per year throughout the entire country, Dr. Jones pointed out. "Hundreds of people died from rabies at that time. Then, a vaccine was developed to immunize dogs against rabies, and the number of cases declined dramatically, to around 200 cases per year nationwide.

Correspondingly, the number of human cases dropped to one or two cases per year for all 50 states. The average number of human cases since 1960 has been three nationwide.

Significantly, 84 percent of all people who developed rabies were bitten either by a dog or cat," Dr. Jones said.

These figures clearly point out that the number-one defense a person can take to reduce the risk of contracting rabies is pet vaccination. "If you can afford to feed your pet, you can afford to vaccinate it," Dr. Jones emphasized. This is responsible animal ownership. People will spend more on kitty litter than they will on vaccinating the cat against rabies," he said.

The average cost of vaccination runs between two and four dollars per animal. Boosters should be given on schedule. Dr. Jones also recommends vaccinating any pleasure horses or prize breeding bulls. But when it comes to an entire herd of cows, the expense could be prohibitive. "If you are talking about 100 cows, consult your local vet for advice."

"Farm cats are probably the most dangerous of all. They are territorial, roam at night when raccoons and skunks are on the prowl, and do a lot of biting and scratching by nature," Dr. Jones pointed out.

Especially if there are children on the farm, vaccinating the barn cats is an excellent idea. Children, looking to help a sick cat, could be the most likely victims. Castrating the male felines is a good idea also, to help keep their numbers down. Significantly, two out of the three human rabies victims who died last year were children—a 12-year-old Williamsport boy and a Houston girl.

There is one other line of defense against rabies, a series of three pre-exposure injections. These are recommended for those who, like veterinarians, humane society personnel, game protectors, trappers and taxidermists, have regular contact with large numbers of unvaccinated animals. If by chance one of these people who has received the vaccination series is bitten by a rabid animal, he would need two additional booster shots to avoid contracting the disease.

For someone who is bitten by a rabid animal without the pre-exposure series, five injections would be required. These shots must be given before any of the flu-like symptoms appear. Once the symptoms have shown up, the mortality rate is nearly 100 percent. In humans, the incubation period can be as short as 12 days and up to a year after the rabid bite.

If you are bitten by an animal you suspect has rabies, washing the area as soon as possible with soap and warm water will reduce

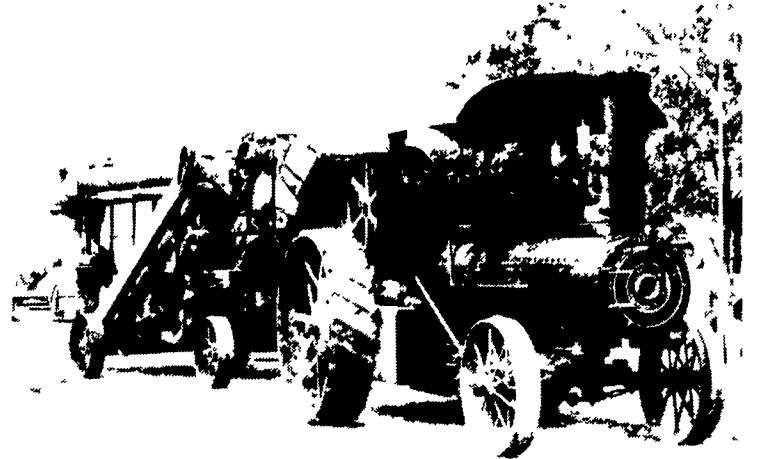
your chances of contracting rabies by 80 to 90 percent. Immediately contact a doctor, or the state Health Department. The special rabies hotline number is 1-800-692-7254. After hours, on weekends or holidays, call 1-717-737-5349.

To have a suspected animal tested, call one of these numbers to find out where to submit the carcass. Be careful not to damage the head when putting the animal down, and refrigerate until it can reach a lab.

Signs to look for in dairy cows include lower milk production, loss

of appetite, reduced water intake, sticky, copious foam around the mouth, choking, listlessness or aggression. Occasionally the rabid cow will bawl a great deal. If you suspect one of your cows is rabid, first isolate her from the rest. Avoid contact with her, especially her saliva, and call a veterinarian. If the cow proves to be rabid, all animals on the farm will need to be vaccinated, including dogs and cats. If in doubt, all persons who may have come in contact with the animal should be treated by a doctor.

Threshermen hold show



The Eastern Shore Threshermen & Collectors Assoc., Inc. is holding its 25th annual Wheat Threshing, Steam and Gas Engine Show this weekend between Denton and Federalsburg, Maryland on Route 313. There will be demonstrations of wheat threshing, baling, shingle sawing, sawmilling, rock crushing and many others, along with rides on "Smokey Joe", a miniature steam train and a large flea market. Free admission and free parking. Free country music shows each evening.

Plowing contest in York Aug. 15

YORK — The York County and Pennsylvania State Plowing contests will be held Wednesday, August 14 (rain date Thursday, August 15). The Plowing contest brings together many farm and nonfarm folks alike. Farmers compete for trophies and an opportunity to advance into the National Plowing contest. Categories in the contest consist

of small plow, large plow, and the antique plow divisions. In addition to the completion there will be numerous equipment demonstrations by local dealers and farmers ranging from No-till grain drills to Antique Tractors. The contest will be held on the farm of Joe Stump two miles outside of New Salem on Days Mill Road starting at 9:00 a.m.



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NO NAME RADIALS

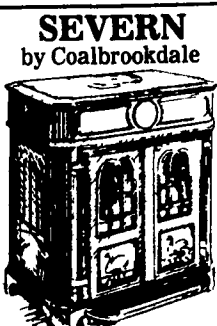
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