

Rabies Continues

UNIVERSITY PARK (Dauphin Co.) — A rabies outbreak among raccoons continues to spread across Pennsylvania, but alert homeowners, hikers and others who spend time outdoors can minimize their risk of exposure to the disease, a Penn State specialist said.

"Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system," said Dr. Thomas Drake, extension veterinarian in the College of Agricultural Sciences' Animal Diagnostic Laboratory. "A bite from an infected animal deposits the rabies virus under the skin. The virus then travels through the nerves until it reaches the brain, a process that can take up to six months. Symptoms don't appear until the disease is in its final, fatal stages."

Until recently, rabies outbreaks generally struck fox and skunk populations, with other species infected in much smaller numbers. "The current outbreak of rabies in raccoons began in West Virginia in the late 1970s and spread to south and central Pennsylvania during the 1980s," Drake said. "It's now reaching the southeastern part of the state and the Allegheny plateau."

Between 1981 and 1989, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture confirmed 3,243 cases of rabies in animals. The number of cases peaked at 700 in 1989. In 1991, 363 cases were reported.

According to the state Department of Health, Pennsylvania has had no human cases of rabies since 1985, but human exposure to the rabies virus is always possible. The best way to avoid exposure is to avoid infected animals—but they can be difficult to recognize.

"Unfortunately, rabies has no consistent symptoms," Drake says. "Rabid animals just behave in unusual ways—for instance, nocturnal animals such as raccoons may be active during daylight. Classic symptoms include foaming at the mouth and aggressive behavior, but rabid animals are just as likely to be abnormally docile. Many lose their natural fear and wander about aimlessly."

Following these guidelines can minimize your risk of exposure to rabies:

- Avoid wild animals that act strangely.

- Vaccinate all pets. Pennsylvania law requires vaccination for all dogs and house cats beginning at

three months of age.

- Barn cats and other neighborhood animals are more likely to carry rabies. If possible, see that they are inoculated or avoid contact with them.

- Be aware of rabies symptoms in farm animals and consider vaccination in areas with a high number of cases.

- If a pet or livestock animal begins to act abnormally or appears unusually sick, call a veterinarian.

- Keep your property free of material that might attract wild animals. Keep garbage in containers that animals can't open or knock down. Don't leave food out

Official Drink

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Milk is Pennsylvania's official beverage. And why not? Dairy is the leading segment of agriculture, the number one industry in the state.

Nearly 13,000 dairy farms produce milk from 683,000 cows. That represents an average of 14,500 pounds of milk produced per cow!

In just 20 years, the number of dairy cows has decreased 3 percent, while the production per cow has increased 44 percent.

for wild animals or stray dogs or cats.

If you or someone you know is bitten or scratched by a potentially rabid animal, take it seriously. "If the bite came from a pet or domestic animal, the animal should be confined and watched closely for several weeks," Drake said. "As a general rule, if the animal doesn't

die within 10 days, it wasn't rabid.

"A wild animal should be captured, if possible, and submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Diagnostic Lab at Summerdale for a rabies test," Drake said. "The bite victim should see a physician for care of the wound and recommendations about antirabies treatment."

Mainesburg Farmer

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this summer, he may do the same thing.

Another problem with pastures involves water. Sometimes a stream or pond is convenient, but often no water supply is readily available. And cows need water to produce milk.

To get water to the cows on the lots, Chamberlain piped water from the barn to 100 gallon tanks. Each tank is connected to a flotation device similar to that found in an ordinary toilet. When the water level drops in the tank, the float sends the message to the pump that more water is needed.

The tanks are placed beneath the electric wire so that two con-

necting lots have water at the same time. This way, Chamberlain doesn't have to move the water source each time the livestock switches lots.

To help farmers learn about the best watering and feeding system for animals despite unfavorable pasture conditions or locations, the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service and Soil Conservation Service held a fact-finding day June 26 at the Chamberlain farm near Mainesburg.

Craig Williams from the Cooperative Extension Office and Paul Shaffer from the SCS Office, both in Wellsboro, were on hand to answer questions about Chamberlain's intense grazing program and the methods he uses to provide his herd with water in the field.

Two weeks prior, the Cooperative Extension Office helped Chamberlain solve the problem of getting water to his cattle in another pasture across the road from the barn.

In 1988, Chamberlain had transformed a wet spot next to the pasture into a 3,000-gallon holding tank by digging down and lining the hole with cement blocks. Drainage tile help guide the water to the hole.

But how was he going to get the water to the cows? He wasn't anxious about spending a lot of money piping the water as he had done in the field behind the barn.

Cooperative Extension provided the answer. With grant money, it had purchased a special watering system called a nose pump. A plastic tube connects the water source to the pump.

Craig Williams explained how the pump works. "By using the same principle as the old-fashioned hand pumps common in days gone by, no electricity is required. The cow simply moves the pump arm back and forth with her nose and water fills the drinking cup."

Are the cows smart enough to figure out how to use it? "You bet," said Chamberlain. As if on cue, a cow wandered over to the nose pump and demonstrated to the group just that.

To test the nose pump's practicality, cooperative extension is making it available free to farmers on a 30-day trial basis. Plans are to purchase a second nose pump to test on sheep.

But the nose pump has its limitations. Twenty-six feet is the maximum height it can move water uphill. Reluctantly, Chamberlain tried the piping method in a pasture further up the hill.

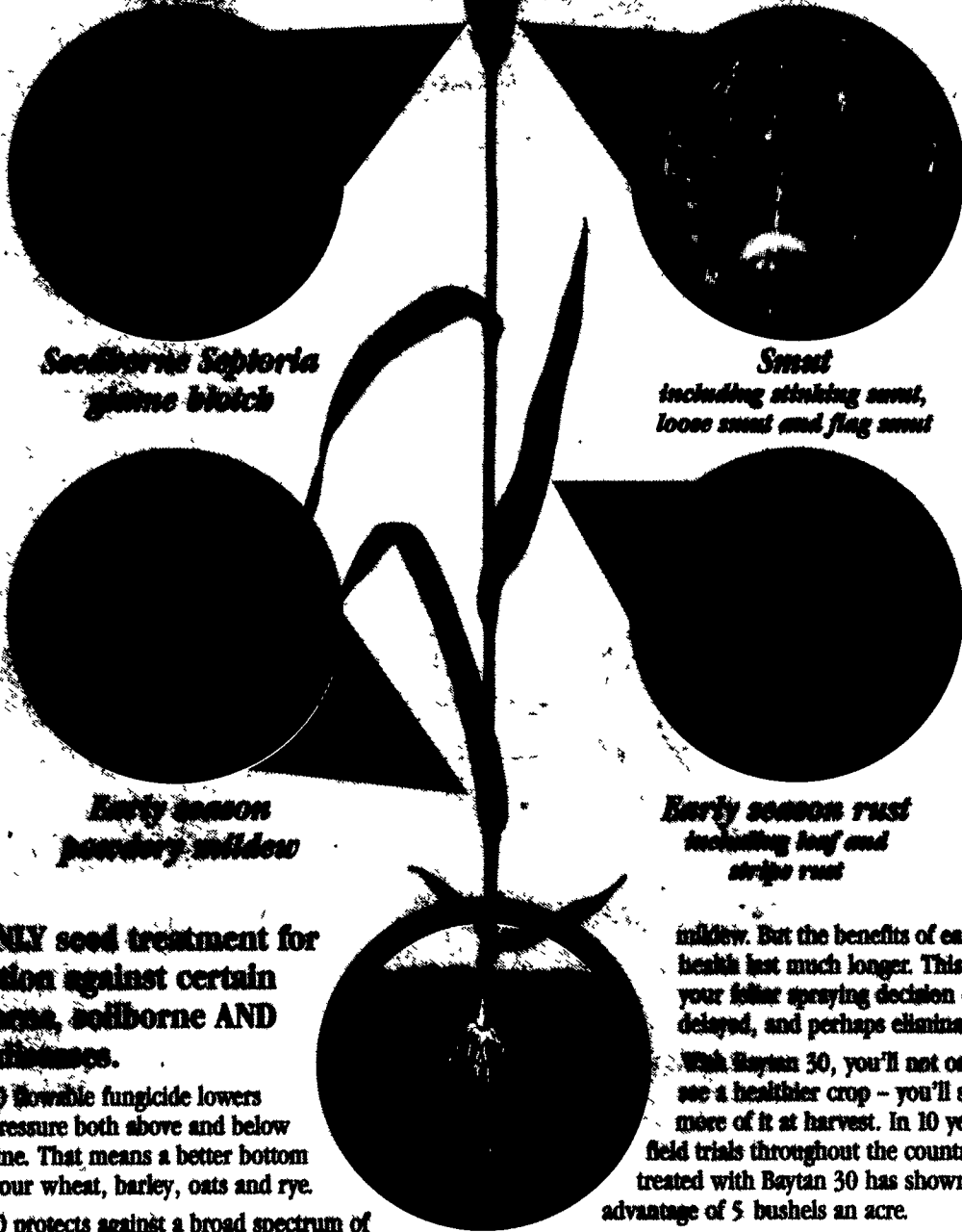
Using a 1/2 horsepower electric pump, he was able to send water to a 100-gallon tank via 400 feet of plastic pipeline. The same type of flotation device used in the intense grazing lots is used in this tank, also.

As Chamberlain can attest, the extra effort was worth it. "Before we began providing water in the pasture, the cows would come to the barn and immediately begin to drink. But with everyone drinking at once, the flow to each drinking cup was barely a trickle so the cows lost interest in waiting for the water long before they drank the amount necessary for peak milk production. Now they are able to get their fill before coming to the barn."

Although the official results aren't available yet on paper, Chamberlain is convinced the new watering system is helping this herd produce 150 extra pounds of milk per day according to bulk tank readings.

Chamberlain figures that in one month, the additional milk will more than make up the cost of the whole watering system.

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