



## The Relationship between the Population of Ixodid Ticks and Climate Change in Stavropol Region

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### ABSTRACT

One of the main factors hindering the development and causing damage to animal husbandry is the parasitism of animals of ixodid ticks - carriers of pathogens of blood parasitic diseases. In the course of this scientific work, a study was made of the influence of changes in climatic conditions on the species composition of ixodid ticks. In the course of the work, for the meteorological station in Kislovodsk, the average winter temperature was calculated, as the average winter wind speed, and the variability, and trend of the Bodman index, characterizing the severity of the climate. The distribution of ixodid tick species largely depends on climatic zones. On the territory of the Stavropol Region, parasitism of 16 species of ixodid ticks belonging to 6 genera was established. Monitoring of ixodid ticks on the territory of the Stavropol Region since 1999 has shown a trend toward an increase in the species composition of ixodid. During the period of climate warming in the territory of the region, there is a weakening of the severity of bioclimatic conditions, especially in winter, which entails the spread and increase in the number of biotopes of ixodid ticks.

**Keywords:** Insects, Parasites, Climate change, Stavropol.

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### INTRODUCTION

Stavropol Region is located in the southern part of the Russian Federation, between 43°45" and 46°15" north latitude and 40°50" and 45°40" east longitude. It occupies the central part of the Pre-Caucasus, the western part of the Caspian lowland, and partly the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus in the area of the Caucasian

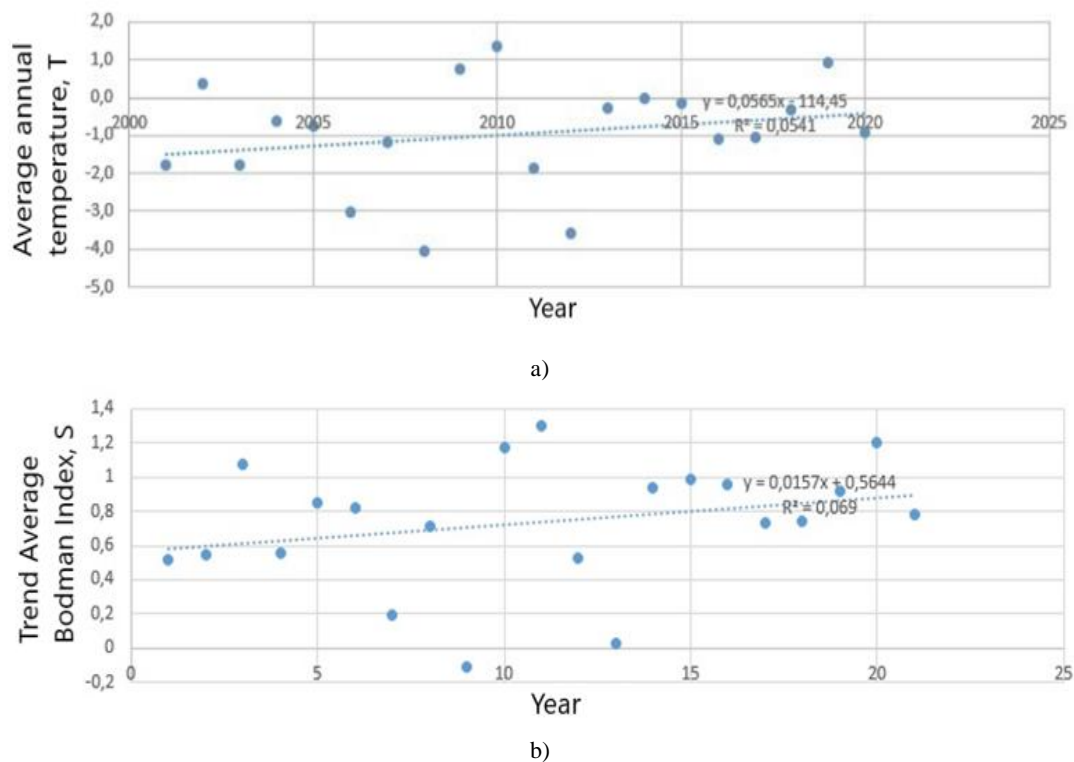
Mineral Waters [1, 2]. According to the relief, the Region is divided into a flat part and a foothill strip. Most of the flat territory is occupied by the Stavropol upland and adjacent parts of the Azov-Kuban lowland, the Kumo-Manych depression (20 m above sea level), and the Caspian lowland [3]. These territorial and climatic conditions contribute to the favorable development of the livestock industry: dairy and beef cattle breeding, and fine-wool sheep breeding. One of the main

factors constraining the development and causing damage to animal husbandry is the parasitization of ixodid ticks on animals – carriers of pathogens of blood-parasitic diseases (piroplasmidosis, teileriosis, anaplasmosis, etc.) [4].

In the vast majority of cases, the most important climatic parameters used both for the identification and classification of landscapes and as indicators of climate change are the air temperature at the earth's surface and precipitation [5]. According to experts, over the

past 100 years, the global air temperature at the earth's surface has increased by  $0.6 \pm 0.2^\circ\text{C}$  [6]. The influence of Regional climate changes on ecological and anthropogenic (including agriculture) systems has been established [7]. A change in climatic conditions towards warming can lead to a shift in climatic zones, as well as to an increase in average temperature [8].

There was also a noticeable increase in the temperature regime of the winter period in the Stavropol Region (**Figures 1a and 1b**).



**Figure 1.** Fourier analysis (2001-2020): a) Dynamics of the average annual temperature; b) Bodman index average trend

Several studies have shown that from 2001-2016 the average winter temperature increased by  $0.9^\circ\text{C}$  in the north of the Region, by  $0.7^\circ\text{C}$  in Kislovodsk, and by  $1.1^\circ\text{C}$  in Stavropol compared to 1961-2000. In 2017-2020, the noted trend continued [9]. However, it was also noted that an increase in temperature takes place during the warm season. Moreover, this increase is so noticeable that in the agricultural sector of the economy, there is a need to take measures to adapt crop production to new climatic conditions [10].

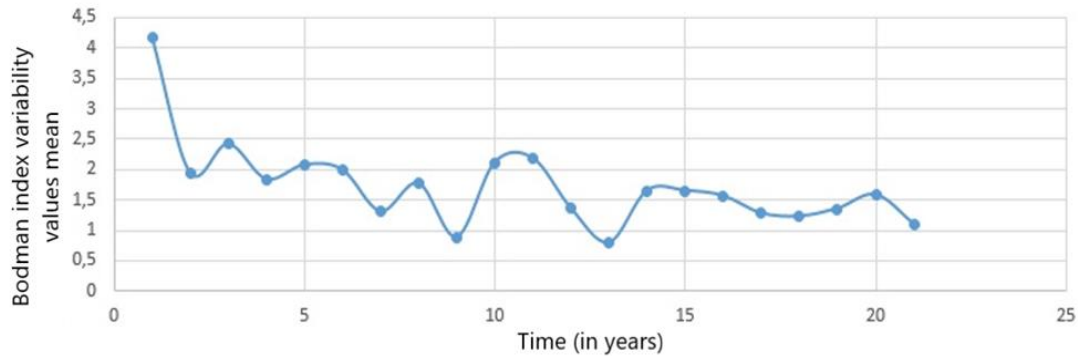
Some authors believe that the warming is significant throughout the territory of the Region and some landscapes can already be attributed to another landscape zone according to the

conditions of humidification (by the ratio of heat and moisture supply) [11]. These conclusions were confirmed by further studies of the Stavropol climate. Since the ongoing climate changes are expressed in the fact that both temperatures and precipitation are increasing at the same time, the overall result of these changes is of particular interest for dry-steppe landscapes [12].

In the XXI century, the average date of the onset of spring in the Central Caucasus Region is February 16, from February 11 in Novoaleksandrovsk to February 25 in Kislovodsk. In the new century, four times the average date for the Region of a steady transition of the average daily temperature through  $0^\circ\text{C}$

fell in January, 7 times - in February, and 9 times - on March. The earliest onset of spring was noted in 2013 - on January 19, and the latest - on March 16 - in 2012, which is inclusive of the concept of global warming. The warming is most noticeable

in the northern latitudes. However, many researchers believe that in both middle and southern latitudes, the main contribution to the increase in average annual temperatures is made by the increase in winter temperature [13].



**Figure 2.** Spectrum variability of the Bodman index

Assessment of bioclimatic conditions based on the Bodman index, moisture coefficient, and other coefficients and indices based on typical climatic parameters will trace the relationship between climatic conditions, landscape appearance, and the spread of ixodid ticks (**Figure 2**) [14].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Having been engaged in the monitoring of ixodid ticks on the territory of the Stavropol Region since 1999, we found a tendency to increase the species composition of ixodids and unfavorable points for the spread of blood parasitic diseases [15, 16].

The information base for the research work was the materials of meteorological observations of the ground network of the Stavropol Center for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring over the past 20 years, as well as reference data on the temperature regime and wind speed in the area of the station location for two long-term periods of the year of the twentieth century.

During the research work for the Kislovodsk weather station, the following indicators were calculated:

- average winter temperature;
- average winter wind speed;
- variability and trend of the Bodman index in the resort of Kislovodsk, characterizing the severity of the climate.

To monitor the ixodofauna, we investigated four areas of the zone of sufficient moisture: Mineralovodsk, Predgornyy, Georgievsk, and Kirovsk districts, as well as the species composition of the ixodid ticks of the city of Kislovodsk. The collection of ticks was carried out using a standard flag – a piece of light-colored flannel with a length of 1 m and a width of 0.6–0.7 m, as well as by collecting directly from animals. The collection of ticks was carried out in March–May, July, and August - October 2016 - 2022.

Typing of ixodid ticks was carried out in the laboratory of veterinary medicine of the All-Russian Research Institute of Sheep and Goat Breeding - Branch of the Federal State Budgetary Scientific Institution North Caucasus Federal Scientific Agrarian Center under a binocular magnifying glass (MBS-2 binocular microscope) using the Methodological guide for accounting and distribution of ixodid ticks in Stavropol Region [17].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the territory of the Stavropol Region, parasitization of 16 species of ixodid ticks belonging to 6 genera has been established [18]. All ixodids are highly specialized parasites of terrestrial vertebrates, especially mammals and birds [19, 20]. The epizootological and epidemiological significance of ixodid ticks is determined by their participation in the transmission of pathogens of many dangerous

vector-borne infections to humans and animals (bacteria, rickettsias, viruses, protozoa, spirochaetes) [21].

The distribution of ixodid ticks species depends more on climatic zones. There are four agricultural zones in the Region: extremely arid, arid, unstable humidification zone, and a zone of sufficient humidification [22, 23]. The zone of sufficient moisture, which includes the Mineralovodsk, Predgornyy, Georgievsk, and Kirovsk districts, covers the sloping plains of the foothills of the Caucasus. The humidification conditions in this zone correspond to the forest steppe, i.e. the evaporation rate is not much higher than the amount of precipitation, and 500-700 mm can evaporate. The humidification coefficient ranges from 0.7–1.0. In the zone of sufficient moisture, winter usually begins in late November-early December and ends in the first decade of March.

The ixodofauna of the zone of sufficient moisture for the period 2016-2022 is presented in **Table 1**.

The dynamics towards an increase in the species composition of ixodids is traced. If in the period 1999 – 2006, the ixodofauna of the areas of the zone of sufficient moisture was represented by 6 species belonging to 5 genera, then already in the period 2016-2022 12 species of ixodid ticks belonging to 6 genera parasitize in these territories.

In the city of Kislovodsk itself in 2022 appeared in the biotope of 9 species belonging to 5 genera (Hyalomma, Dermacento, Rhipicephalus, Ixodes ricinus, Haemaphysalis).

**Table 1.** Ixodofauna of the zone of sufficient humidification of the Stavropol Territory in the period from 1999 – 2006 to the period 2016 - 2022.

Districts	Type of Ticks	
	1999 -2006	2016-2022
Mineralovodsk district	Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)	Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)
	Hyalomma marginatum	Hyalomma marginatum
	Dermacentor marginatus	Dermacentor marginatus
	Dermacentor pictus	Dermacentor pictus
	Rhipicephalus sanguineus	Rhipicephalus sanguineus
	Ixodes ricinus	Ixodes ricinus
Predgornyy district		Hyalomma marginatum
	Hyalomma marginatum	Hyalomma anatolicum
	Dermacentor marginatus	Dermacentor marginatus
		Dermacentor pictus
		Dermacentor daghestanicus

Georgievsk district		Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)
		Hyalomma marginatum
	Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)	Hyalomma scupense
		Hyalomma anatolicum
	Hyalomma marginatum	Hyalomma detritum
	Dermacentor marginatus	Dermacentor marginatus
		Dermacentor pictus
		Dermacentor daghestanicus
		Rhipicephalus sanguineus
		Rhipicephalus turanicus
	Ixodes ricinus	
Kirovsk district		Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)
	Boophilus calcaratus (annulatus)	Hyalomma marginatum
	Hyalomma marginatum	Hyalomma anatolicum
	Dermacentor marginatus	Dermacentor marginatus
	Ixodes ricinus	Dermacentor pictus
		Ixodes ricinus
Kislovodsk city		Hyalomma marginatum
		Hyalomma scupense
	Hyalomma marginatum	Hyalomma anatolicum
	Dermacentor marginatus	Dermacentor marginatus
	Dermacentor pictus	Dermacentor pictus
	Ixodes ricinus	Dermacentor daghestanicus
		Rhipicephalus sanguineus
		Ixodes ricinus
		Haemaphysalis punctate

One of the factors of such a spread of ixodid ticks is certainly an increase in the average winter temperature, which contributes to the spread and increase in the number of biotopes favorable for the hatch of ixodids.

**CONCLUSION**

Analysis of the data obtained showed that both for Kislovodsk and for the entire territory of the Region, frosts are a characteristic feature of the spring and autumn periods.

For a day with frost, a day is taken on which at least one of the dates the minimum air temperature was below 0 °C, while the average daily temperature is positive. The date of the last spring frost marks the beginning of the frost-free period, and the date of the first autumn frost marks its end. In accordance with the general trend of climate warming, the duration of the frost-free period in the territory of the Region should increase. However, due to increased climate instability, both late frosts in spring and early frosts in autumn can be expected, which may lead to a reduction in the frost-free period. The growing season of crops and natural vegetation has been lengthened by about one to four days per decade over the past 50 years in the northern hemisphere, especially in high

latitudes. The boundaries of plant growth and animal habitat have shifted towards the pole and up in absolute height. There is an earlier flowering, an earlier arrival of birds, and an earlier time of the appearance of insects in the northern hemisphere. There is also an increase in average annual temperatures in the Region, largely due to the warming of the cold period of the year. During the warm period, despite the general increase in the temperature background, in some months there is a tendency for cooling in almost all landscape zones.

These studies show that during the period of climate warming in the territory of the Region, there is a weakening of the severity of bioclimatic conditions, especially in winter, which entails the spread and increase in the number of biotopes of ixodid ticks.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None

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**ETHICS STATEMENT:** None

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