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Rabies Suspected:

Red Fox Terrorizes Hankins Residents

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By Frank Brownell

HANKINS--A red fox suspected of being rabid terrorized several residents of a rural area just outside of Hankins Wednesday, biting two men, one of whom is now undergoing treatment to prevent an occurrence of the fatal disease.

Reportedly bitten and requiring treatment in the incident was a Kansas City man, John (*sic*) Barnett, 34, visiting in Sullivan County for the first time, bitten while he was working on a friend's deck at around 12:15 p.m. Wednesday.

Also bitten by the red fox was a Whitney Point, NY man, David Peters, who was attacked by the same red fox shortly after the original incident at a neighboring house where he was visiting.

Peters, however, did not require treatment as the fox's bite did not penetrate Peters' shoe.

Barnett, 34, said he had come to Sullivan County to visit friends of his who own a country home north of Hankins, and was outside working on the deck when he saw the red fox approaching out of the corner of his eye.

"I saw it coming at me, and tried to scare it away, but it just kept coming and coming, until it started to come after me, Barnett said, after receiving the first of five anti-rabies shots he must take in order to prevent his contracting the fatal disease.

"I tried to kick it away at least six or eight times, and each time it would come back at me, until it bit me in the leg," he said.

"Finally, I managed to kick it over the side of the deck, and got in the house, when I called 911 and they told me who to contact. I started to take the shots today," Barnett added.

Barnett said that because he was leaving the area soon, he would get the first two shots while here, and the last three shots after returning home to Kansas City.

After receiving treatment for the bite at the Grover Hermann Division of Community General Hospital in Callicoon, Barnett reportedly returned to his friend's house, and resumed working on the deck, when the red fox came after him again.

Jumping in his truck, Barnett drove to a neighboring house, owned by Hankins attorney Mickey McGrady, to warn McGrady and his family about the nearby danger.

It was at this moment that Peters drove up in his vehicle, and stepping out, was immediately attacked by the fox which bit him on the shoe, but did not break any skin.

The fox then jumped up on McGrady's deck, and began hurtling himself at the windows, in a vain try to break into the house, McGrady said.

"There he was, leaping up against the windows, and we're inside running around closing all the windows because there was just screens in place, and he would have broken through," McGrady said.

Once the fox ran off, McGrady added, Barnett got back in his vehicle, and began to blow the truck's horn, as the fox was obviously attracted to movement and noise, at which point, the fox started running for the truck and was run over and killed by Barnett.

"It was amazing," said McGrady. "I mean, this fox was attacking tires and garden hoses and trucks, and it was obviously in distress."

Following the fox' death, state police were called and removed the carcass for further testing to confirm if it was rabid or not, although there is very little doubt in anyone's mind that it was.

"After he was killed, I was cleaning saliva off from at least five feet up the side of the house," McGrady added.

"I really couldn't believe it," Barnett said. "I had already read something about the rabies problem in New York, but it makes me wonder if the people living around here aren't taking it too much for granted.

"All I can say is don't get careless. I wouldn't want anyone to go through what I went through today," he said.

But Barnett is not alone in suffering through a bite from a rabid animal, as a seven-year-old Kenoza Lake girl was previously bitten by a rabid raccoon about two months ago.

The rabies outbreak has been advancing toward New York from the Mid-Atlantic states since the mid-1970's, and entered into New York in May with the discovery of a rabid raccoon in Steuben County.

However, since that time, the brunt of the rabies outbreak in New York state has been borne by Sullivan County, which so far has recorded nearly 20 instances of rabid raccoons, plus a rabid skunk and a rabid bat.

"This was my first time in Sullivan County, and I certainly would love to come back and visit again, despite what happened," Barnett said.

"I never realized there was country like this in New York, although being bitten like this has been a real shock to me," Barnett said.

"But one thing I want to say is that anyone who is afraid of taking the shots to prevent rabies need not fear them.

"They are no longer painful, and actually, the shot was on of the most painless I have ever received," Barnett added.