

## **NEWS FROM EUROPE**

### **New Conditions**

If you are investigating a disease or condition with an unknown or previously unreported aetiology, why not provide a short preliminary report and leave your contact details; perhaps someone else is working in a similar field. This quarter's new condition comes from Madrid, Spain:

### **Multifactorial parasitic (?) disease of scops owls in Madrid city parks (Spain)**

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The Scops owl (*Otus scops*) is the smallest nocturnal raptor in Southern Europe. The species undergoes summer migration and nests mainly in the vicinity of human buildings in parks, riverine forests, singular trees or ruins. Since 1997, a mostly fatal condition is being observed among fledglings, with severe diphtheronecrotic lesions throughout the whole of the oral mucosa, including the tongue. The lesions macroscopically resemble those observed in trichomoniasis, candidiasis and avian tuberculosis. Bacterial contamination of the lesions and miasis are frequent. Birds are in fair to poor condition upon necropsy, and oral lesions and liver enlargement are the only macroscopic lesions observed. Cases were first observed in a particular park in the city of Madrid and in consecutive years seems to have been spreading to other parks. The condition has not been observed in birds from the rest of Spain or outside Madrid.

86 live Scops owls were examined between 1998 and 2000, 52 of which (37 nestlings, 15 adults) were free-living from a nestbox project installed in 1999, also 29 affected owls were necropsied.

Prevalence of oral lesions among free-living nestlings was 24,3%, while about 50 % of clinically admitted birds presented lesions. Findings in live and dead birds include normal oral flora, including highly antibiotic resistant *Staph. aureus*. Cultures for *Candida* spp. and *Trichomonas* spp. have been negative, as well as coprological analysis for parasites (flotation). In about 50% of the necropsies, nematode larvae are present on deep mucosal scrapings. Histologically severe ulceration, necrosis, inflammation and reactive hyperplasia of the epithelium are prominent. Cross sections of larval stages of a nematode parasite can be observed in the epithelium and mucous glands.

Using chicken embryo fibroblasts, Reovirus was isolated from different locations in seven birds, while from one bird a Herpesvirus was isolated. 81 sera were analysed for presence of antibodies against owl herpesvirus by means of virus neutralisation. Seroprevalence was 11.1% among all tested birds (5.9% among birds with oral lesions), and seropositive birds presented low antibody titres (1:8 and 1:6). From the present results the nematode larvae (possibly *Porrocaecum* spp.) seem to be related to the aetiology of the disease, but the source of infection and the role of other factors such as Herpesvirus, host immune response or toxic substances from park fertilization/pesticide fumigation are unclear.

Current investigation includes identification of the parasites, studies on prey species of the owls, characterisation of the isolated herpesvirus and investigation of other (e.g. toxic) factors.

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### **European Section website**

The first few pages of the long-awaited EWDA website are now available on line. Unfortunately owing to a problem with the registration of the domain name you can only access the site at the moment by using the following URL address,

<http://193.133.84.101>

Try it and see what you think of the first few pages. The site is still under construction so any contributions and/or suggestions for future content would be much appreciated. Send these via my email address on the site. Richard Delahay, Central Science Laboratory, Wildlife Disease Ecology Team, Woodchester Park, Nympsfield, Glos GL10 3UJ, UK.

Dr Richard Delahay

**European Section.** Material suitable for publication includes news of recent wildlife disease outbreaks and new diseases in Europe, short case reports, announcements and reports of relevant meetings in Europe, and job and scholarship announcements. Submissions should be in English, but members for whom English is a second language, will be accommodated as far as possible. The deadline for the next issue is August 2001.

Please mail, fax or e-mail submissions to me (I am on Foot and Mouth Disease operations in Cumbria, England but return to my office occasionally), Paul Duff, VLA Penrith, Merrythought, Calthwaite, PENRITH, Cumbria, CA11 9RR, United Kingdom, e-mail [p.duff@vla.maff.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:p.duff@vla.maff.gsi.gov.uk) Fax ++44(0)-1768-885314.