

News from Europe

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The Sixth EWDA conference, Uppsala, Sweden, 9-12 September 2004.

Workshop on TSEs and CWD Uppsala, Sweden, 8 September 2004.

International speakers. Keynote speaker Dr Roy Bengis, Kruger N.P., talking about anthrax and tuberculosis. Themes – Disease interactions between predators and prey animals, Emerging diseases of European Wildlife. Free papers. More at the web site – www.sva.se/ewda/.

West Nile Virus Surveillance in Europe The global importance of West Nile Virus infection is increasing. In the News from Europe section we hope to include short articles from several European countries, giving an indication of the surveillance carried out in that country for WNV. The first article is from France. Please contact Paul Duff if you are involved in national WNV surveillance in Europe.

West Nile virus in France in 2003

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Background

In France, West Nile virus (WNV) was first recognised in 1962-65 when it caused infections in humans (19 clinical cases, no deaths) and horses (500 clinical cases, 50 deaths) living in the Camargue area, a wetland located in Southern France. After an epidemiological silence of thirty-five years, the disease emerged in 2000 in the same area, where an outbreak was observed concerning only horses (76 clinical cases, 21 deaths). In 2003, a WNV outbreak in the Var district was detected through the surveillance system.

Methods

The national surveillance of WNV in humans, horses and birds which was initiated in 2001 was based on: -

surveillance of encephalitis cases both in humans and horses all over France, but particularly focussed in the Camargue area

viral detection in mosquito samples collected in the Camargue from July to October 2001,

surveillance of abnormal mortalities in wild birds in the Camargue

serological monitoring of sentinel birds on a monthly basis from June to November, including 150 mallards and 150 chicken located in 30 sites distributed all over the Camargue area.

Results

In 2001, the detection of WNV in mosquito pools was negative (997 pools tested).

In 2001 and 2002, there were no confirmed clinical cases in humans or horses and no abnormal mortality was observed in the avifauna. Only two seroconversions were detected in sentinel birds, one in October 2001 in a mallard and one in August 2002 in a chicken indicating a very low circulation of WNV in the Camargue region.

In 2003, WN monitoring in sentinel birds from the Camargue was negative. Meanwhile a cluster of WN encephalitis cases was detected in humans and horses in the Var district, located more than 100 km East from the Camargue, in a drier area. A total of 3 encephalitis and 4 mild illness cases were identified in humans, all living or having stayed in the vicinity of the city of Fréjus. Four equine cases were identified, living within 25 km distance West from the human cases. Symptoms had first occurred during the last 2 weeks of August in the human cases and between the 17th and 23rd September in the horses.

A serological study was carried out among horses and (human) blood donors in the area where cases had occurred. Preliminary results show that out of 906 horses, 306 (34 %) were tested positive for anti WNV IgG and 10 to 30% out of them, positive for IgM. Concerning blood donors, final data aren't available, but it seems that only a few positive results were revealed. Among the mosquitoes captured in October around the homes of the human cases, *Culex pipiens* was the predominant species. None of

the mosquito pools were tested positive for WNV. Moreover, no abnormal mortality was observed in the avifauna.

Conclusion

This outbreak of West Nile Virus infection in the Var caused a limited number of cases in humans and horses, highly clustered in time and place. Seroprevalence studies suggest a low level of circulation of the virus in humans and an important circulation in horses in the Var district. These events confirm the fact that WNV seems to be able to appear in France in other locations, in addition to the known areas. The national surveillance program must be adapted in 2004 to incorporate this epidemiological finding.

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European Section.

Material for publication in News from Europe can include recent wildlife disease outbreaks and new diseases in Europe, short case and meeting reports; job and scholarship announcements. We encourage submissions, and will help with the English language, if required. The deadline for the next issue is May 2004.

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