Oral presentations

Post-mortem analysis of reasons for death in hedgehogs undergoing rehabilitation

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OBJECTIVES

Given a reported reduction in wild hedgehog numbers, rehabilitation of compromised animals is considered important by a number of hedgehog 'hospitals'. Yet a number of animals die while undergoing rehabilitation. Here we performed post-mortem examinations of 30 hedgehogs which had died in one rehabilitation centre, to determine the cause of death. Could animals have been euthanased earlier with a consequent reduction in poor welfare?

METHODS

Thirty hedgehogs which had died in one rehabilitation centre were examined post-mortem and tissues

subjected to histological evaluation to determine the cause of death.

RESULTS

All animals exhibited pulmonary pathology including lung consolidation and exudate on cut surfaces with free fluid in the thorax. Histologically, pulmonary oedema and congestion were present in all samples with *Capillaria* and *Crenosoma* species visualised in the majority of cases. 70% of animals had empty or fluid filled intestines while 23% had histological confirmed enteritis. 60% had mesenteric lymph node enlargement with 28% having splenomegaly. Autolysis made histopathological of gastrointestinal material difficult in a number of cases. *Capillaria* and coccidian were noted in 40% of samples. 30% of animals had dermatological pathology with erythema and focal alopecia common with skin scaling, loss of spines and waxy secretions particularly marked at the limb base.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

This study indicates the prevalence of disease in hedgehogs undergoing rehabilitation, although as these are animals which died this may represent a higher proportion of disease than in surviving animals. Nevertheless careful clinical examination may indicate euthanasia to be a more appropriate action than rehabilitation in some cases.

Faecal analysis in prairie dogs (*Cynomys* spp.)

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OBJECTIVES

Prairie dogs can be purchased from suppliers, breeders and some pet shops, and are now seen more frequently in general practice. The aim of this study was to perform faecal screening to assess whether there were potential zoonotic concerns, after two juvenile prairie dogs, belonging to an Animal Encounter company presented due to weight loss and diarrhoea.

METHODS

Faecal samples were collected over a three day period from ten separate enclosures, either housing a group of prairie dogs, or an individual animal. The enclosures

belonged to private owners and from two separate Animal Encounter companies. The samples were analysed at an external laboratory.

RESULTS

All ten samples cultured a mixed, heavy growth of normal faecal flora. None of the samples cultured *Salmonella* spp. or *Campylobacter* spp. All samples were negative for *Cryptosporidium* spp. Yeasts were present in six of the samples (60%). Gastrointestinal parasites were not seen in 90% of the samples. In one sample, a moderate number of tapeworm ova were visualised on direct examination, and numerous tapeworm ova were seen on faecal flotation. The cestode ova were identified as the dwarf tapeworm, *Hymenolepis (Rodentolepis) nana*.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

This small study has identified *Hymenolepis nana* in prairie dogs; this is of concern due to its zoonotic potential, particularly children who may not observe strict hygiene practices after touching these animals. Routine faecal screening of pet prairie dogs is advised, and preventive hygiene measures such as assiduous hand washing are essential when in contact with these animals and their enclosures.