

# the Vet's Corner

by Infectious Disease Section  
State Department of Health

## PSITTACOSIS IN CALIFORNIA

Psittacosis (ornithosis) in man is usually an acute, generalized infectious disease clinically manifest as a transient, influenza-like illness, or as more serious pneumonic disease with high fever, chills, severe headache, nausea and vomiting, non-productive cough, chest pains, pulmonary infiltrates, myalgias and malaise. Some infections may be asymptomatic, while others may be complicated by encephalitis, pericarditis, myocarditis, endocarditis, or death. In humans, the incubation period is 4-15 days, and infection is usually acquired by inhalation of dust from the droppings of infected birds. The causative agent, *Chlamydia psittaci*, is an obligate intracellular parasite demonstrable by Giemsa or fluorescent antibody strains. However, diagnosis is best established by demonstrating a significant rise in complement-fixing antibodies. Patients should be treated with tetracycline (1 gm/day x 21 days) to achieve cure and prevent relapse. In California, human disease is primarily associated with psittacine birds (parrots, parakeets, cockatoos, cockatiels) kept as pets or with domestic and wild pigeons and doves.

California is experiencing a substantial increase in the number of laboratory confirmed cases of psittacosis in pet birds reported by veterinary diagnostic laboratories throughout the State. Since July 1975, to date, approximately 100 cases of psittacosis in pet birds have been reported to the Department of Health. These avian cases were located in private homes, private aviaries, pet shops, wholesale pet dealers and commercial breeders. Some avian cases were detected from the investigation of human illness, but most were diagnosed because of illness in the

birds. Over 50 percent of the infected birds were parrots; the other species of ill psittacine birds included cockatiels, lovebirds, parakeets, budgerigars and pigeons and doves.

The increased number of infected birds has been paralleled by increased number of laboratory confirmed human cases of psittacosis. In 1976, 14 human cases were reported, and in 1975, 24. By contrast, during the decade 1965-1974, an average of 8 cases were reported annually.

Psittacosis in birds can be eliminated by the proper use of chlortetracycline (CTC) in the feed. No vaccine is available. To minimize the hazard of diseases in imported birds, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires that all imported birds be held in approved quarantine stations for 30 days and that all psittacine birds be fed adequate levels of chlortetracycline during the quarantine period. However, more effective control is needed to insure that birds receive adequate levels of CTC in their feed while quarantined, because psittacosis has been diagnosed in birds recently released from quarantine. Of greater importance to disease transmission are the untreated birds smuggled into the country. In California, a program of banding and sales-record keeping of parakeets has played a major role in keeping parakeet-breeding aviaries relatively free of psittacosis. All human and avian cases require investigation by the local health department. For information on the diagnosis and treatment of psittacosis in birds, consult the Veterinary Unit of the Infectious Disease Section, 415-843-7900, Ext. 555.

## MORE NEWCASTLE

The State of Hawaii placed a ban on all birds from California from July 28 to August 7, 1977, because of an outbreak of Newcastle Disease.

The Hawaiian animal health officers discovered the disease in a shipment of parrots from Exotic Birds and Supplies, a dealer in Bakersfield, California. All of the birds died or were depopulated.

Exotic Birds and Supplies was placed

under quarantine, Newcastle Disease was discovered and all of the birds at that establishment were depopulated also. All of the birds that had been shipped have been traced and killed or quarantined. The outbreak has been completely eliminated.

The government agencies have not been able to trace the source of the birds prior to Exotic Birds and Supplies.



*Ken McConnell*

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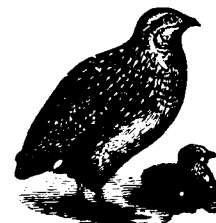
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