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Neospora caninum in Wild Waterfowl: Occurrence of Parasite DNA and Low antibody titers.

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Abstract

Thirty-five adult waterfowl (14 males and 21 females) representing various orders and species were sampled during the hunting season from 2015 to 2016. Antibodies to *Neospora caninum* were detected by IFAT on blood samples, while heart and brain were subjected to molecular analysis for the detection of *Neospora caninum* DNA. Twelve birds (34.3%) (6 *Anas crecca*, 3 *Anas platyrhynchos*, 2 *Anas penelope*, 1 *Anas acuta*) showed antibodies versus *N. caninum*, while 10 animals out of 35 (4 *Anas crecca*, 2 *Anas platyrhynchos*, 2 *Anas penelope*, 1 *Anas acuta*, and 1 *Vanellus vanellus*) scored positive for at least 1 sample, with an overall prevalence of 28.6%. The present report shows for the first time the occurrence of antibodies and *N. caninum* DNA in waterfowl. The avian species investigated in the present report, which feed directly from the soil and/or water, would be able to ingest oocysts excreted by final canid hosts and could contribute to parasite transmission in the sylvatic cycle. To achieve a definitive result about the role of these avian species in the epidemiology of this protozoan, the presence of viable parasites should be demonstrated by bioassay and/or culture, as well as histological evidence of *N. caninum* cysts in avian tissues.

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