

A FURTHER EXPERIENCE WITH DISEASE IN DOVES

by

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An organism, Escherichia coli, present naturally in the gut of practically all vertebrates, can be a source of illness in doves! While the veterinarians may know of many such cases, I have only heard of it in the endangered Echo parakeets of Mauritius Island in the Indian Ocean (McKelvey, 1977, PS & GN 4:47).

About 1960 in Davis, California a continuous wind enduring over a day and gusting 30-40 miles an hour seemed to leave a large outdoor pen of doves unaffected. But a week later large numbers grew listless and started dying. Most died "fat", that is, quickly. Dead and dying doves were examined by the veterinarians at the Vet. School there. The only organism detected was E. coli. But this E. coli was unique. It was the first time they had seen a strain simultaneously resistant to all four major antibiotics of the time, including penicillin, streptomycin, aureomycin, and I don't remember the fourth.

The next time I ran across a similar situation (wind and E. coli involvement demonstrated) was 1976 and indoors! A large vacuum cleaner used previously on floors about doves then stored unused for three years was again employed to sweep the floors of the big dove room. A few days later some doves in the lower cages began getting listless. They exhibited labored breathing (tail pumps up and down while the bird is just perching), and in about a day or two died. Dr. David Graham of the Vet. School found only E. coli. Then I remembered the wind at Davis, California. Well, the vacuum cleaner put out quite a wind close to the lower pens. The "epidemic" subsided, since the vacuum cleaner was not used again.

Actually, I don't like to use a vacuum cleaner because the noise scares the birds resulting in some dumped eggs and young. It takes several regular frequent uses to get the birds even partially used to it. The previous uses of the vacuum cleaner may well have caused some losses too, but the caretaker and I were not alert to events and causes then. Nor did we have such a helpful veterinarian willing to put out some effort for such an insignificant organism as a dove.

Well a third E. coli epidemic occurred after the automatic fan on the steam heating unit went out. We had to put in a constant fan to keep the building above 50° F in the record breaking cold winter and winds of January, 1977. I suspect the wind induces a respiratory distress and E. coli invades the lungs and air sacs.

Perhaps others have seen such losses after a wind and not known a putative cause?