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Erysipelas in Pheasants

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Erysipelas of pheasants has been reported (1), however, those reports concern only an individual bird or two, and the disease has apparently been of little consequence either among wild birds or birds raised on commercial game farms.

This report concerns an outbreak on a commercial game farm located in south central Iowa. Seven pheasants were received at the Iowa Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory on December 8, 1947; five of the birds were dead at the time and two were still alive. The owner reported that the losses were not heavy but constant. All the birds were less than a year old and both males and females were affected. Many of the birds were reported to have a diarrhea. The birds were confined to large lots. Previous to the beginning of losses the birds had been in corn fields but at the time were on a blue grass pasture lot. The owner reported that he had examined several dead birds and had seen no gross lesions, except that the pupils of the eyes were dilated and the birds seemed to have very poor vision. This feature was noted only 24 to 36 hours before the birds died.

Post-mortem examination in the laboratory of the five dead birds showed a general congestion, which was especially prominent in the liver. Four of the birds showed numerous hemorrhages on the heart, and all of the birds showed hemorrhages in various body muscular tissues. All had a severe catarrhal enteritis. A nephritis was also observed in each bird.

The two birds which were alive at the time of receipt were held for observation. One of them was a male and showed sufficient life to resent attempts to handle it. The other was a female and was in practically a comatose condition. Surprisingly enough the following morning the male was found dead while the female appeared to be slightly better. The female continued to improve and eventually survived without any observable ill effects after recovery from the acute stage.

Bacteriological examination of six dead birds resulted in recovery from each bird gram-positive organisms morphologically resembling Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae. Cultural identification methods resulted in the formation of acid without gas from lactose, dextrose and galactose. No acid was formed from sucrose, maltose, arabinose, raffinose, rhamnose, salicin and sorbitol. No hydrogen sulphide was produced. No change occurred in BCP milk. Indol was not produced. Nitrites were reduced. VP and MR tests were negative and there was a slight hemolysis after 24 hours growth. A typical “test tube brush” growth without liquefaction occurred in gelatin.

Mouse inoculation tests made by the injection of a six-hour broth culture of the organism intraperitoneally resulted in death of the mice in approximately 48 hours or less. Similar organisms were recovered from each of 3 mice so inoculated.

Two chickens, six weeks of age, were injected intraperitoneally with a .5 cc of similar culture. One of these birds became listless, droopy and off feed after 48 hours however, after another 24 hours recovery took place uneventfully.