



Pancheo's Disease of Parrots (Psittacid Herpesvirus Disease)

**Article supplied by Bruce Whiting
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A new disease has appeared in the Newcastle area and is causing some concern among bird fanciers and veterinarians. The disease is called Pancheo's disease or inclusion body hepatitis of psittacines (parrot-like birds).

History

First seen briefly in 1929 in Brazil for a few years then nothing was heard until 1974 when it reappeared in the USA, parts of Africa and Europe. The disease was not thought to be in Australia before 1980 but since then a growing number of suspected and confirmed cases have been reported.

It is almost certain that the illegal importation of birds is the cause of the disease appearing in Australia. At this stage Australia is free of many devastating bird diseases due to our geographical isolation and strict quarantine laws. However illegal importation can change this overnight. So great is the danger from these diseases, e.g. Newcastle disease, that suspicion of the disease can warrant the extermination of entire aviaries.

As Pancheo's disease presents no threat to the poultry industry the Government is taking no action. However bird fanciers as individuals and through their societies should take what action they can to prevent the spread of this disease.

Symptoms

The symptoms are similar in most cases:

1. Yellow watery diarrhoea for 1-2 days.
2. Severe depression only hours before death. The bird will be fluffed up, not eating, eyes often closed and often on the floor of the cage.
3. In some cases no diarrhoea is seen, only depression and death or the bird may just be found dead.
4. Only psittacines (parrots) are affected such as cockatoos, budgerigars, galahs, lovebirds, rosellas, macaws, etc. The passerines - finches, canaries or mynahs are not affected.

Post mortem

There is usually little to see except a hint of hepatitis (liver disease). Further laboratory testing is needed to confirm the disease.

Diagnosis

1. A history of acutely ill and suddenly dying birds with or without yellow watery diarrhoea.
2. Post mortem shows little except some liver disease.
3. Recent introduction of new birds (parrot species only) into the aviary.

These three alone are enough to create a strong suspicion of Pacheco's disease. Confirmation is by laboratory testing and ruling out other diseases such as psittacosis bacterial infections or poisonings.

Spread of infection

The disease is transmitted through droppings which contaminate the food and water. The infection spreads rapidly if food and water containers are moved between flights or cages.

Treatment

There is none.* All birds which show signs of the disease die. Remember some birds may catch the disease but show no signs. These birds may become carriers and transmit the disease to others.

Prevention

To prevent this and other infections entering the aviary all new birds should be quarantined for six weeks. Where possible all food and water containers should be either elevated or hooded to prevent droppings contaminating them.

Undoubtedly the best advice for preventing this or any other infections disease, whether viral, bacterial or parasitic, is strict and regular hygiene and good husbandry.

***2009 Update on Treatment:** Birds dying with Pacheco's disease can be treated with acyclovir (80-100 mg/kg three times a day for 10 days). These birds will, however, not be cured of the virus infection and will become carriers of the virus.
[Australian Wildlife Health Network: Psittacid Herpesviruses and Mucosal Papillomas of Psittacine Birds in Australia.](#)

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