

Coprologic Survey of Parasites of Spotted Hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya

Anne L. Engh,^{1,4} Keith G. Nelson,² Robert Peebles,¹ Alexander D. Hernandez,³ Karen K. Hubbard,¹ and

Kay E. Holekamp¹ ¹ Department of Zoology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1115, USA;

² Department of Pathology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1671, USA; ³ Program in Ecology and Evolution, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901-8525, USA; ⁴ Corresponding author

(email: enghanne@msu.edu)

ABSTRACT: Seventy fecal samples from spotted hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya were examined for parasite eggs and oocysts using sugar flotation. A total of nine parasite genera were identified, and all samples were positive for at least one parasite species. Most individuals were infected with *Ancylostoma* sp. and *Spirometra* sp., and these species had the highest median intensity of infection. Other parasites identified include *Isoospora* sp., Taeniidae, Spirurida, *Toxocara* sp., *Mesocestoides* sp., *Dipylidium* sp., and *Trichuris* sp.

Key words: *Ancylostoma*, *Crocuta crocuta*, Kenya, parasites, *Spirometra*, spotted hyena.

Spotted hyenas (*Crocuta crocuta*) are the most abundant large carnivore in sub-Saharan Africa (Frank, 1986), yet little is known about their parasites. Hyenas feed on a wide array of prey (Cooper et al., 1999) and frequently interact with other predators and scavengers at kills (Kruuk, 1972). Thus, spotted hyenas may be infected with parasites similar to their sympatric competitors, and they may be reservoir hosts for some of these parasites. Most records of hyena parasites are accounts from a few dead individuals (Mettrick and Beverley-Burton, 1961; Graber and Blanc, 1979) or studies of particular parasite taxa (Nelson et al., 1965; MacPherson et al., 1983). Intestinal parasites reported in spotted hyenas include two nematode and five cestode species (Round, 1968; Bwangamoi, 1970; Jooste, 1990). Our goals were to identify intestinal parasites present in a large group of wild hyenas and to describe the prevalence and intensity of these parasites.

From June 1999 to July 2000, we collected 207 fresh fecal samples from 70 hyenas residing in a single social group in the Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya (1°49'S, 35°20'E). Hyenas in the study

population feed almost exclusively upon ungulates, although they have been observed eating invertebrates, birds, and other mammals (Cooper et al., 1999). Individual hyenas were recognized by their unique patterns of spots and other physical characteristics such as ear notches. All samples were collected from individuals observed defecating. We used liquid displacement to measure 0.5 ml of fecal matter into 7 ml of Sheather's sugar water solution (Zajac, 1994). The mixture was homogenized and centrifuged for 5 min at 7,200×G, then supernatant was transferred to a McMaster slide. All eggs and oocytes observed within the gridlines were identified and the number of eggs per gram was calculated and recorded. Because we examined eggs and oocytes rather than whole worms we were able to identify most parasites only to genus. In order to avoid pseudoreplication in analyses of prevalence and intensity of infection, only a single, randomly chosen sample from each individual was used.

Nine parasite taxa were identified in the 70 fecal samples (Table 1), including one spurious species (*Nematodirus* sp.). In 135 additional samples from the same individuals, two more species, *Trichuris* sp. and *Moniezia* sp. were identified. Like *Nematodirus* sp., *Moniezia* sp. was spurious (i.e., it was a parasite of the hyenas' prey). Neither spurious species was included in measures of parasite richness. All 70 individuals were positive for at least one species of parasite. On average, each individual was infected with 2.60 ± 0.13 species (range 1–5). Intensity of infection, that is, the mean number of eggs per gram among infected individuals, was overdispersed

TABLE 1. Prevalence and intensity (eggs per gram of feces) of parasite eggs and oocytes in the feces of 70 wild spotted hyenas.

Parasite	Prevalence (%)	Median intensity (e.p.g.) ^a	Maximum intensity (e.p.g.)	Variance/mean ratio of abundance
<i>Ancylostoma</i> sp.	90.0	1,000	17,600	0.44
<i>Spirometra</i> sp.	74.3	3,000	67,200	1.07
<i>Isospora</i> sp.	25.7	200	4,000	1.91
<i>Dipylidium</i> sp.	21.4	300	1,200	2.00
Spirurida	15.7	200	300	1.90
Taeniidae	12.9	200	3,400	2.36
<i>Mesocestoides</i> sp.	11.4	200	500	2.11
<i>Toxocara</i> sp.	5.7	200	1,600	2.44
<i>Nematodirus</i> sp.	4.3	200	300	2.30
Unknown	2.9	150	200	—
<i>Trichuris</i> sp. ^b	0	0	0	—
<i>Moniezia</i> sp. ^b	0	0	0	—

^a e.p.g. = eggs per gram of feces.

^b *Trichuris* sp. and *Moniezia* sp. were observed in additional samples from the same individuals.

(variance > mean) for most parasite taxa, so median levels of infection are displayed in Table 1.

Hookworms (*Ancylostoma* sp.) were the most common parasite, with 90% of individuals infected. Graber and Blanc (1979) reported infections of *Ancylostoma duodenale* in hyenas from Ethiopia and the eggs found here (60 × 40 μm) were consistent with their description. The spirurid eggs were approximately 36 × 12 μm and were likely *Spirocerca lupi*. *Spirocerca lupi* is frequently found in Kenyan dogs, but it was not observed in three hyenas dissected by Brodey et al. (1977). We also found eggs of *Toxocara* sp. Although *Toxocara canis* has been identified in hyenas (Baylis, 1937), the dimensions of these eggs (62 × 60 μm) more closely resembled those of *Toxocara cati*.

Spirometra sp. eggs were common (74% of individuals infected) and had the highest median intensity of infection. These eggs (65 × 38 μm) were probably *Spirometra pretoriensis*, which Nelson et al. (1965) and Graber and Blanc (1979) found in hyenas. Plerocercoids (spargana) of *Spirometra* are relatively common in the hock joints and flesh of several ungulate species that hyenas feed upon (Sachs and Sachs, 1968), and *Spirometra* sp. was the most

prevalent parasite in a survey of lion feces in Tanzania (Müller-Graf, 1995). Several other types of cestode eggs were also identified. We found numerous taeniid eggs (35 μm), which could be *Taenia crocutae*, *T. hyaenae*, *T. olngojinei*, or *Echinococcus granulosus*, all of which have been reported in hyenas (Baer, 1924; Mettrick and Beverley-Burton, 1961; Nelson et al., 1965; Dinnik and Sachs, 1969). In addition, we found 20 × 25 μm eggs of *Mesocestoides* sp., which have not previously been recorded in hyenas but are known to infect other African carnivores, including lions (*Panthera leo*), servals (*Felis serval*), and caracals (*Felis caracal*) (Round, 1968). In some samples, we found eggs (35 × 25 μm) of *Dipylidium* sp., a common parasite of Kenyan dogs and jackals (*Canis mesomelas*) (Nelson et al., 1965), which was previously reported in hyenas (Round, 1968).

A single protozoan, *Isospora* sp. was observed. The size of the oocysts (35 × 26 μm) was intermediate between that of *Isospora felis* and *I. lionina*, two species recorded in African lions but not in hyenas (Patnaik and Acharjyo, 1970; Bjork et al., 2000). The paucity of protozoan species recovered in this study may have been a result of the concentration method used.

Protozoans tend to become distorted and desiccated in saturated sugar and salt solutions (Zajac, 1994). Finally, 2.9% of samples contained unidentified parasites.

Spotted hyenas are generalists, and it is not surprising that many of the parasite genera that infect hyenas also infect other African carnivores. Most of the parasites that we found in hyena feces have a heteroxenous life cycle, which requires transmission through an intermediate host. Identification of these parasites to species level will provide greater insight into the overlap in parasite communities of sympatric carnivores.

Although fecal flotation procedures may effectively detect only a subset of parasite eggs present in a sample (Zajac, 1994), the techniques used in this study are relatively simple and can be replicated in remote field sites with little equipment. By collecting similar samples from different locations and over longer time periods, we may gain insight into the ecologic and behavioral factors that influence susceptibility of individuals and populations to parasitic infections.

We thank the Office of the President of Kenya for permission to conduct this research. We also thank the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Narok County Council, and the Senior Warden of the Masai Mara National Reserve for their cooperation. Special thanks go to M. Szykman, S. Wahaj, R. Van Horn, S. Dloniak, K. Greene, and T. L. Morelli for their excellent assistance in the field. This work was supported by NSF grants IBN9906445 & IBN0113170 to KEH, and by a NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, an MSU Distinguished Fellowship, and a Barnett-Rosenberg Fellowship to ALE.

LITERATURE CITED

- BAER, J. G. 1924. Contribution a la faune helminthologique Sud-Africaine. *Annales de Parasitologie humaine et comparee* 2: 239–247.
- BAYLIS, H. A. 1937. Records of some helminths from the spotted hyaena. *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* 20: 438–441.
- BJORK, K. E., G. A. AVERBECK, AND B. E. STROMBERG. 2000. Parasites and parasite stages of free-ranging wild lions (*Panthera leo*) of northern Tanzania. *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine* 31: 56–61.
- BRODEY, R. S., R. G. THOMPSON, P. D. SAYER, AND B. EUGSTER. 1977. *Spirocerca lupi* infection in dogs in Kenya. *Veterinary Parasitology* 3: 49–59.
- BWANGAMOI, O. 1970. A check-list of helminth parasites of animals in Tanzania. *Bulletin of Epizootic Diseases of Africa* 18: 229–242.
- COOPER, S. M., K. E. HOLEKAMP, AND L. SMALE. 1999. A seasonal feast: Long-term analysis of feeding behaviour in the spotted hyaena (*Crocuta crocuta*). *African Journal of Ecology* 37: 149–160.
- DINNIK, J. A., AND R. SACHS. 1969. Zystikerkose der Kreuzbeinwirbel bei Antilopen und *Taenia olngojinei* sp. nov. der Tupfelhyane. *Zeitschrift für Parasitenkunde* 31: 326–339.
- FRANK, L. G. 1986. Social organization of the spotted hyaena (*Crocuta crocuta*). I. Demography. *Animal Behaviour* 34: 1500–1509.
- GRABER, M., AND J. P. BLANC. 1979. *Ancylostoma duodenale* (Dubini, 1843) Creplin, 1843 (Nematoda: Ancylostomidae) parasite de l'hyene tachetee *Crocuta crocuta* (Erxleben), en Ethiopie. *Revue d' Elevage et Medecine Veterinaire des Pays Tropicaux* 32: 155–160.
- JOOSTE, R. 1990. A checklist of the helminth parasites of the larger domestic mammals and wild mammals of Zimbabwe. *Transactions of the Zimbabwe Scientific Association* 64: 16–32.
- KRUUK, H. 1972. The spotted hyena: A study of predation and social behavior. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 335 pp.
- MACPHERSON, C. N. L., L. KARSTAD, P. STEVENSON, AND J. H. ARUNDEL. 1983. Hydatid disease in the Turkana District of Kenya III. The significance of wild animals in the transmission of *Echinococcus granulosus*, with particular reference to Turkana and Masailand in Kenya. *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 77: 61–73.
- METTRICK, D. F., AND M. BEVERLEY-BURTON. 1961. Some cyclophyllidean cestodes from carnivores in southern Rhodesia. *Parasitology* 51: 533–544.
- MÜLLER-GRAF, C. D. M. 1995. A coprological survey of intestinal parasites of wild lions (*Panthera leo*) in the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania, East Africa. *Journal of Parasitology* 81: 812–814.
- NELSON, G. S., F. R. N. PESTER, AND R. RICKMAN. 1965. The significance of wild animals in the transmission of cestodes of medical importance in Kenya. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 59: 507–524.
- PATNAIK, M. M., AND L. N. ACHARJYO. 1970. Notes on the helminth parasites of vertebrates in Baranga Zoo (Orissa). *Indian Veterinary Medical Journal* 47: 723–730.
- ROUND, M. C. 1968. Checklist of the helminth parasites of African mammals. *Technical Commu-*

- nications of the Commonwealth Bureau of Helminthology Number 38, Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, Farnham Royal, UK, 252 pp.
- SACHS, R., AND C. SACHS. 1968. A survey of the parasitic infestation of wild herbivores in the Serengeti region in northern Tanzania and the Lake Rukwa region in southern Tanzania. *Bulletin of Epizootic Diseases of Africa* 16: 455–472.
- ZAJAC, A. M. 1994. Fecal examination in the diagnosis of parasitism. *In* *Veterinary clinical parasitology*, 6th Edition, M. W. Sloss, R. K. Kemp and A. M. Zajac (eds.). Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, pp. 3–88.

Received for publication 31 December 2001.