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Author: SNOEYENBOS, G. H.

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Tuberculosis in a Ruffed Grouse

G. H. SNOEYENBOS

Department of Veterinary & Animal Sciences
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.

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During November of 1958, a partially dressed ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbelus umbelus*) which had been shot in Massachusetts was submitted for examination because it had grossly abnormal viscera. The cadaver was emaciated which was consistent with the hunter's report of a weak flight. Examination revealed an enlarged liver and spleen with numerous small yellowish-grey caseous nodules in these organs as well as in the lungs and in many areas of the peritoneum. Large numbers of slender acid-fast bacilli were found in smears made from a number of nodules. Lesions of caseation necrosis with peripheral giant cells and encapsulation were observed in sections stained with hematoxylin and eosin.

The presence of classical lesions and the demonstration of acid-fast bacilli was considered justification for a diagnosis of tuberculosis. Unfortunately no attempt was made to isolate and classify the organism.

Practically all species of birds are considered to be susceptible to tuberculosis, and in almost all instances except in the parrot, the infection is due to the avian type of tubercle bacillus. The relatively few recorded instances of tuberculosis in free-living wild birds are thought to be a result of exposure to material derived from infected domestic chickens. Feldman (Feldman, W. H.: Avian tuberculosis infections. Baltimore, The Williams and Wilkins Company, 1938, pp. 234-242) cited reports of the disease in the free-living crow (*Corvus brachyrynchos*), raven (*Corvus corax*), barn owl (*Strix pratincola*), cowbird (*Molothrus a. ater*), eastern sparrow hawk (*Falco s. sparverius*), in an unidentified owl and in a great variety of captive wild birds.

The ruffed grouse referred to in this report was killed in a woodlot near several homes which may have maintained a few free-ranging "backyard" chickens. Although avian tuberculosis is rare in commercial poultry in Massachusetts, it is occasionally found, and may be common in "backyard" flocks.