
AN EPIDEMIC VIRAL INFECTION IN SNAKES IN THE NETHERLANDS.

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During the last few months I was repeatedly confronted with diseased snakes from different owners in the country.

The disease seemed to be highly contagious. Clinical signs varied. In the majority of cases the onset of the disease was indicated of the voiding of the foul smelling, greyish mucoid faeces. This then was followed by respiratory problems and the expulsion of a blood stained, brownish fluid from the glottis. Shortly before death such animals showed convulsions. Less frequent were tremors of the head combined with incoordination of movements of the body and hypersensitivity to external stimuli. In individual cases curling of the body in a cramped way and incapacity to move was noticed. In some other cases the patients' signs were restricted, they would eat well and only after a short period of convulsions did death occur. Some of these patients revealed a progressively increasing weakness; death occurring in about fourteen days.

At necropsy the lesions proved to be different in the various individuals. A fairly constant finding was an accumulation of fluid around the brain. Often the lung contained purulent material. On bacteriological examination a variety of bacteria was cultured. The liver often showed a degenerated aspect and a severe gastritis occurred in one animal. Transmission electron microscopy of the brain, the liver and the stomach in all cases revealed virus particles.

Discussion and general recommendations

A problem with virus infections is, that affected animals cannot be treated. From experience it appeared that combatting secondary bacterial infections with appropriate antibiotics could be useful. Snakes with overt signs should be separated from the rest of the collection of animals and located far from the healthy specimens.

The most important thing is the avoidance of contamination!

-This can be affected by keeping newly acquired in quarantine on a different site for at least 6 months. During this period the animals should be stressed several times in order to provoke overt disease in virus carriers.

-It is of utmost importance to be extremely precise in hygienic measures. Never use the same materials in different cages. Food that has not been eaten must be destroyed. All used materials should be disinfected before further use. Contaminated cages should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected with e.g. quarternary ammonium compounds or formaldehyde solutions.

-Under the present situation you should not introduce any new snakes into your collection.

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