

FALCON HERPESVIRUS HEPATITIS

Falcon herpesvirus is an infectious and contagious, acute viral disease caused by Falconid Herpesvirus 1. Since the disease mainly affects the liver, it is also known as falcon inclusion body hepatitis.

Among falcons, gyr falcons, gyr hybrids, and prairie falcons are highly susceptible to the disease. Saker and peregrine falcons are also susceptible to the infection, but to a lesser extent. It is believed that close contact with pigeons is the primary source of infection in falcons. Direct contact with other sick falcons is also suggested to play a role.

Symptoms

At the onset of infection, falcons show depression, unresponsiveness, weakness, loss of appetite, regurgitation, and the appearance of 'lime-green' urates in the droppings of up to three days' duration. In many cases, no clinical signs are seen, and sudden death will be the only presenting sign. The disease strikes so rapidly that the affected bird will still be in good body condition at the time of death. Pre-mortem diagnosis is difficult, since most of the clinical signs are non-specific; however, the disease can be diagnosed by endoscopic biopsy of the liver and spleen.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is primarily confirmed by necropsy findings along with isolation of the virus from the liver and spleen. Gross lesions during post-mortem examinations are mostly limited to patchy death of cells (necrosis) in the liver and spleen; upon microscopic examination of the affected organs, one will find the classic intranuclear inclusion bodies (representing sites of viral replication). Light-to-tan colored necrotic regions are also sporadically seen in the pancreas, lungs, bone marrow and lymph follicles of the intestine.

Management

There is no known treatment for falcon herpesvirus infection. Supportive care can be attempted on sick birds but is almost universally unsuccessful. When the disease is suspected, the affected bird(s) should be quarantined immediately to try to prevent possible spread of the infection. Fortunately, the virus is easily killed with commonly available virucidal disinfectants; take care to clean all surfaces, water bowls, and falconry equipment that may have come into contact with affected bird(s).

Falcon herpesvirus hepatitis is a devastating disease for infected birds so attempts should be made to prevent infection. Because pigeons are a primary source of infection for falcons, avoid using pigeons for training and for feeding falcons. It is also recommended to reduce the stress of captivity and concurrent disease by good husbandry and management practices. Stress and poor management may activate a latent virus, since natural cases involving falcon herpesvirus have occurred primarily in captive birds.

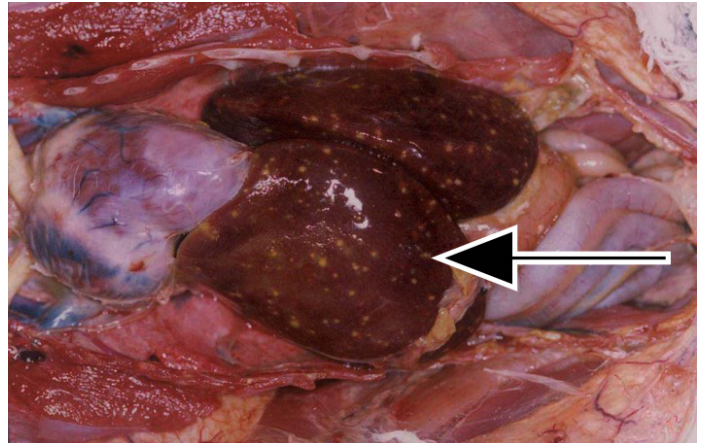


Fig. 1. Image of the internal organs of a falcon that died from herpesvirus hepatitis. Note the yellow areas of necrosis throughout the liver.



Fig 2. Pigeons are a primary source of herpesvirus hepatitis infection for falcons; thus, avoid using pigeons for training and for feeding falcons.

The treatment of ill birds should always be carried out by a qualified veterinarian.

References:

Raghav, R and Samour, J. Inclusion Body Herpesvirus Hepatitis in Captive Falcons in the Middle East: A Review of Clinical and Pathologic Findings. *Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery*, 33(1):1-6 (2019).



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For More Information

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- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis
- Avian Pox Infection in Falconry Birds
- Veterinary Care for Your Pet Bird*
- Basic Care for Companion Birds*
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Caring for Backyard Chickens
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