**ALERT!! Trichomonosis Gallinae confirmed in our birds ☹**

**Submitted by Bonnie Black**

When I started in the canary hobby about 20 years ago, I was warned by one of my mentors not to ever admit that my birds had an illness since other breeders would then shun my birds in the future. For a few years I followed her advice but as I gained confidence in the hobby I realized that if everyone kept their secrets about health issues in their birds and how they treated it, no one would ever learn how to manage these challenges. I also realized that most people admire the honesty. In that spirit, I will share the lessons many of us learned at our recent show. Please learn from our experience and do your part to stop the spread of this new pathogen in the American birds!

THE BACK STORY…

As this year’s molting season came to an end and the songs of my 2019 birds started to emerge, I was excited by what I was hearing in some of them. When I caged them up around Thanksgiving, they were sounding really promising. I was also training a team of boys that were part of an imported group that I was even more excited about.

But as the weeks of training went on, I started to notice some ***very* s*ubtle*** changes. Some of the boys would open their beaks and wiggle their tongues before they started singing. Others were starting to develop a very faint ‘fuzzy’ quality to their voices and/or losing volume in their songs. *Please note – This is important … All of these birds continued to appear and act healthy.*

By New Years, I started to wonder if I was dealing with air sack mites, so I treated them just in case. No change. Then I tried a tip from an old Timbrado judge which was to float a slice of garlic in their water – no change. Then I replaced water with orange juice for 48rs.. This ‘treatment’ improved them slightly but only for a few days. Ultimately I surrendered and just brought them to the show since the compromised birds were still singing ‘okay’ and I knew we needed some entries in the show to help cover the costs.

As the show birds were staged before our judge, I started to notice that some other breeder’s birds had a similar sound as some of mine. Low volume and/or a faint fuzzy/buzzy quality to their voices. Some of the tours of birds that came from previously successful breeders lacked the ‘diction’ in their tours. In a way it was a relief that it wasn’t just mine, but it was also very disappointing to witness team after team score much lower than expected. It was not all caused by this organism, but it did play a part.

About midway through our show, when one of the teams that I brought was staged, our judge, Bora Ergun, turned to us and said something like, “We’ve been hearing this in birds in Europe for several years, but this is the first time I’ve heard it in America”. Then he said that he believed the problem was a parasite called Trichomonosis and it can be treated with flagyl.

As the show went on, more birds showed symptoms of the problem. Bora’s diagnosis had also prompted many of us to do what you will probably do after reading this article… google: Trichomonosis in canaries. Although there was lots of information about this pathogen in pigeons(called canker) and raptors (called flounce), there’s very little to be found about it in passerines. But there are a few articles about the appearance of this ‘bug’ about a decade ago in the wild finch population in England and France. Soon after it appeared in domestic canaries and finches in that area.

Eager to get my hands on a treatment for my birds ASAP, I made an appointment with my avian Veterinarian, David Rupiper (East Petaluma Animal Hospital, Petaluma, CA) the day after the show. Over the years I’ve developed a deep respect for his skills with identifying and treating unique avian issues. I am acutely aware that I’m very blessed to have access to him, since most vets have less understanding of canaries than most of us. Through this article, now you do too. ☺

I brought 4 of my boys that showed the most serious symptoms. I ‘staged them’ for Dr. Rupiper and they all sang immediately. He asked me what I thought was wrong with the birds, so I described the impaired sound in their voices so he could listen closer. Then I told him what Bora thought the problem was. Dr. Rupiper seemed to become very interested and then explained that he had written several professional articles about that pathogen over the years. He seemed surprised (or scientifically excited) to hear that trichomonosis gallinae may now be affecting passerines (finch type birds) in our domestic population in the US. *(NOTE: You can google his name for more detail and some of these articles.)*

Dr. Rupiper then told me that he knew how to take a mucus sample from the birds’ throats and examine the sample under the microscope to see if the flagellate (Trichomonosis ) was present. He proceeded to collect the samples from the back of the first canary’s throat. He didn’t spot any of the flagellates with the first sample, but the second sample was full of them! He was able to show me the little critters under the microscope – very cool!! Bora’s diagnosis was officially confirmed!

After the confirmation of the presence of Trichomonosis Gallinae , Dr. Rupiper discussed the treatment options with me. Ultimately I was sent home with a suspension of flagyl (like what giardia is treated with). This prescription was to be administered by putting .05 (about 3 drops) of a 8mg/ml suspension in their beaks every 12hrs for 5 days. Within 24 hrs. of the first treatment, the birds sounded 90% better!! Dr. Rupiper also helped me find another medicine online (Foy’s through Foys pigeon supply – but there are other resources) that I can treat the rest of my birds with through their drinking water –Arizole 10%) (Ronidozole).

So where did this come from??? We’ll never know exactly, but it’s likely to have been brought in via imported birds from Europe (not just waterslagers). Since this is a common pathogen in pigeons, there is some speculation that the ‘bug’ may have adapted to canaries/finches in aviaries of pigeon fanciers who also had canaries but who knows???

Although several of us here in CA imported birds in November that apparently had the infection, it’s important to know that there were a few breeders at our show who had birds with the same symptoms, but they had never been in contact with these imports. This suggests multiple sources of the problem.

I want to make it clear to everyone reading this, that since this parasite is relatively new to the finch populations, both wild and domestic, especially in the US, it’s not something even the most ethical breeder has been watching for. (Have you???) As I’ve said above, the symptoms were very subtle and the birds appeared healthy in the early stages of the infection. It’s easy to miss. Even the veterinarian who issued the health certificate for our recent imports missed it!

Please understand that even if you personally haven’t imported any birds recently, unless you’ve had a ‘closed aviary’ for the past decade or so, it’s possible that new birds you’ve bought within your region were originally bred from birds from Europe, it’s possible your aviary has been contaminated too. Remember, this problem is not limited to waterslager canaries! Watch for the symptoms and treat sick birds.

Some other things I’ve learned about this organism from Dr. Rupiper and Bora…

* The ‘bug’ we are dealing with is on the weaker end of the spectrum (so far). Some Trichomonosis can be brutal on the birds and is often fatal. Still, the kind we are dealing with affects their performance as song birds, health and vitality overall, breeding/fertility and infant mortality and if left untreated would eventually kill them.
* The parasites mostly attack the back of the throats, crop and esophagus of the birds. Some show problems swallowing. Obviously this can affect nutrition intake as well as the song. Although we didn’t observe this in our show birds, apparently many birds affected by this ‘bug’ will show signs of matted feathers around their nostrils, and/or be seen wiping beaks on perches. Some will develop sinus infections and other related health issues.
* Stress, such as training, shows and shipping can give these flagellates that have been ‘laying low’, the opportunity to take over.
* Trichomonosis needs to be in the host bird or in water to survive. It’s spread via direct beak to beak contact such as when parents feed chicks or during courting behavior or contaminated water sources. (Splashing of bath water can introduce it to another cage and so can mixing up water containers that haven’t been dried).
* Lixit type water bottles (the ones with long tubes and a ball bearing at the end), can protect the little flagellates during cleaning. - Make sure all water containers are allowed to thoroughly dry (‘Trich G’ cannot survive without a drop of water!).
* Use chlorinated tap water instead of bottled water to help prevent the spread of the disease.
* Quarantine all new birds for several months to protect your old birds as well as the new ones. Make sure you don’t do what I did and top off water cups without paying attention to which bottle came from which cage when replacing them. (DUH!) Mouths of water bottles that fill one cup and then go to the next can also spread the disease if it comes in contact with contaminated water.
* Sanitize cages and accessories with a product called Vircon S. (Bora swears by this stuff for minimizing viral, bacterial and flagellate infections.
* Most drugs to fight this problem can be found at pigeon supply stores like Foys Jedds, or Mercasystems. Remember, this disease is called “Canker” in pigeons. Dr. Rupiper told me to dose the canaries with 2/3’s the pigeon dose.

Let’s do our part to eliminate this nasty flagellate

from our North American aviaries!