OCCURRENCE OF *ORNITHONYSSUS BACOTI* (HIRST, 1931) IN AN INDIAN GERBIL *TATERA INDICA*, IN KERALA

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Introduction

A fresh dead specimen of *Tatera indica* (Muridae, Rodentia) was obtained form Kerala Agricultural University main campus at Vellanikkara, Trichur District, Kerala on 20th May 1996. The cause of death may be due to poisoning, as no external injuries were found. On examination, five live ectoparasites could be collected-three from the basal region of the pinnae, one from the upper back and the other from the abdominal region Studies made on the identification of this ectoparasite is presented in this paper.

Results and Discussion

The parasites were identified as *Omithonyssus bacoti* belonging to the family Macronyssidae of the suborder Mesostigmata. The body has sclerotised shields or plates on the dorsal side. The dorsal plate is narrower and tapering gradually to a blunt point.

Numerous setae are present on this plate and they are of same size as those present on the nearby areas of the tegument. The sternal plate on ventral side has three pairs of setae. The anal opening is situated on the anterior half of the anal plate.

Mites of the genera *Laelaps, Androlaelaps, Trombicula, Cheyletus, Radfordia, Leptotrombidium, Listrophoroides* and *Odontocarus* have been reported in Indian Gerbils (Nadchatram & Traub, 1966; Alfred, 1969; Srivastava & Wattal, 1975; Kudryashova,1976; Kudryashova, *et.al.*, 1976; Sandhu & Kapoor, 1977; Fain & Hyland, 1980), but not *Omithonyssus bacoti*. This mite is called as ropical rat mite, but is cosmopolitan occurring in both tropical and temperate regions of the world infecting hamtsers, small marsupials (Kettle, 1990) and wild rodents, wild carnivores, domesti cat and man (Flynn, 1973; Soulsby, 1982).

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Being haematophagus, high populations of this mite can cause death of their host by exsanguination (Kettle, 1990) *Omithonyssus bacoti* is a vector of rickettsial organisms causing murine typhus, rickettsial pox and Q fever caused by *Coxiella burneti*; it is also a vector of rodent filarial worms. It is also reported to cause severe dermatitis in man (Ram, *et al.*, 1986) and hence of public health importance.

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