Brief Communication
A study on prevalence of Eimeria spp. infection in camels of Tabriz region

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ABSTRACT
This investigation was carried out to determine the prevalence of Eimeria infections and the diversity of Eimeria species in camels of Tabriz region. The prevalence of Eimeria spp. infection and the intensity of faecal oocysts were determined in 164 camels using flotation and sporulation techniques. Faeces of 34 camels (20.73%) were infected with four Eimeria species including E. bactriani (52.42%), E. cameli (19.31%), E. pellerdyi (15.68%) and E. dromedarii (12.59%). Of infected animals, mixed infection was at most with four Eimeria species in 10.54% of camels. There was a significant difference between the prevalence of Eimeria infection in camels among different age groups (P<0.05). Infection rate was higher in female camels (54%) with less than one year-olds. There was significant differences in the prevalence between male and female camels in all age groups (P<0.05). It is concluded that Eimeria infection is a problem in camel husbandry in Tabriz region and further studies will reveal more information about economic effects of this parasite which it will be useful for establishing control programs.

Keywords: Prevalence, Eimeria spp., Camel, Tabriz

INTRODUCTION
Old world camels and New World camels belong to the Camelidae family under the suborder Tylopoda (Wernery & Kdaden 2002). Twenty million old world camels inhabit in North and East Africa countries, and Middle and Far East countries. The camel is an economically important animal in arid and semi-arid areas of the world. The coccidia comprise of a large group of obligatory intracellular parasites (Duszynski et al 1999). The coccidia genera Eimeria and Isospora both infect camels, however only Eimeria species were recognised as causing disease (Kaufmann 1996). Five reported Eimeria species have the capability to infect camels. They are intestinal parasites (Boid 1985, Kaufmann 1996, Lewine & Ivens 1986, Yakhchali & Cheraghi 2007). Although camels are considered to be susceptible to some species of Eimeria described, only a few published studies are available. Camels are considered as multi purpose animals (meat,
transportation, skin, and milk) especially, in north-west of Iran. Upon the annual report of Iranian Veterinary Organization (IVO) in 2004, the average population of camels was 108,000, distributed over too many flocks and camel-raising areas in Iran. Approximately 0.3% of this population is living in north-west of Iran, especially, in East Azerbaijan province. The objective of recent study was to determine the prevalence of Eimeria infections and Eimeria spp. diversity of camels of north-western Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Over a period of one year (41 samples per season), 164 camels from small flocks in Tabriz region were randomly selected. Sample size was calculated according to Thrusfield (1997). The camels were crossbred and indigenous which reared traditionally. Fecal samples (10g per animal) were collected directly from the rectum of each examined camell. Each camel was numbered and subjected to a clinical examination. The sex and age of camels and also their faecal consistency were recorded. The age was determined on the basis of eruption of permanent incisor teeth (Smallwood 1992). A part of each fresh fecal sample (3g) was mixed with tap water (42 ml). The mixture was subjected to centrifugal sedimentation (2500 rpm for 2 minutes) and floatation technique using standard Sheather solution (Saturated sugar solution with specific gravity 1.12). The oocysts were counted by the modified McMaster technique (Kaya 2004). The intensity of infection was estimated in terms of oocysts per gram of feces. Sporulation of oocysts was performed using Hendrix procedure (Hendrix 1998). At least 100 oocysts were obtained from feces samples of infected animals for parasite’s specie identification. Prevalence of mixed infections with two or more Eimeria spp. were estimated. The identification of Eimeria species was based on morphometry and morphology of oocysts, according to Dubey and Pande (1963), Kawasme and Elbihari (1983) and Soulsby (1986). Statistical evaluation was undertaken using SPSS for Windows. Data were evaluated with the Chi-square test with 95% confidence interval (CI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of examined animals, 34(20.73%) camels were found naturally infected. Infection rate in young camel calves (<1 year-olds) was higher than old ones. Some of the infected animals showed wasting, diarrhea and debility without mucus and blood. Older camels shedding oocysts in faces did not show any symptoms of coccidiosis. There were significant differences in prevalence between different age groups (P<0.05). The prevalence of infection in male and female camels is shown in Table1. Fourteen (14.89%) male and 17 (24.29%) female examined camels had Eimeria infection. Infection rate was higher in female camels (54%) with less than one year-old. There was significant differences in the prevalence between male and female camels in all age groups (P<0.05) (Table1).

Table1. The prevalence of Eimeria infections and consistency and intensity of oocysts in naturally infected camels in Tabriz suburb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (year)</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of camels</th>
<th>Prevalence (%)</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Laboratory findings showed that Eimeria species were prevalent parasites in gastrointestinal of the examined camels comparing to infection with eggs of helminthes. E. bactriani (52.42%) was the most prevalent specie. E. cameli (19.31%), E. pellerdyi (15.68%) and E. dromedarii (12.59%) were other...
identified species with respective prevalence rate (Figure 2). Of 20.73% infected animals, mixed infection was at most with four *Eimeria* species in 10.54% of naturally infected camels.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1.** Prevalence of *Eimeria* spp. exhibited by oocysts morphology and morphometry in camels.

Single infection was observed in 6.12% of animals (Table 2). The high prevalence and infection rate of yellow-green diarrhea in camel calves (*Camelus bactrianus*, 16%) indicated coccidiosis as the principal cause of disease (Yakhchali & Cheraghi, 2007). The prevalence of *Eimeria* infections and intensity of oocysts in naturally infected camels in this region is partially in agreement with the findings of Kawasmeh and Elbihari (1983).

**Table 2.** Prevalence of mixed *Eimeria* species in naturally infected camels of Tabriz region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of <em>Eimeria</em> species</th>
<th>Number of infected camels</th>
<th>Prevalence (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sex and age of camels had a significant effect on prevalence. This finding is in agreement with Yakhchali and Cheraghi (2007). According to Kaufmann (1996), young camels are much more susceptible to *Eimeria* infections than adult camels. It seems that the camels among the age group of >4 year-olds with low prevalence of *Eimeria* infections and having normal form of faeces with low ooc counts served as carriers for camel calves. While nearly all animals were exposed to coccidia, some of them may not show obvious signs of disease. *E. bactriani, E. cameli* and *E. dromedarii* infections are common in indigenous camels in this region. The most prevalent species was *E. bactriani*, and *E. dromedarii* was the least common. These findings are in line with previous observations (Daruish & Golemansky 1993, Hussein *et al* 1987, Kasim *et al* 1985, Wei & Wong 1990, Yakhchali & Cheraghi, 2007).

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2.** Identified *Eimeria* spp. from naturally infected camel of Tabriz region (* sporulation time*) (1000×):

- a. *E. bactriani* (9 days*), b. *E. cameli* (13 days), c. *E. pellerdyi* (6 days), d. *E. dromedarii* (16 days)

In contrast, Abubakr et al (2000) reported that the highest prevalence rate belonged to *E. dromedarii* in camels. In previous studies by Kawasmeh and Elbihari (1983), Yagoub (1989), Kasim *et al.* (1985) and Anwar and Hayat (1999) one or more species were found (*E. dromedarii* and *E. cameli*) with an overall prevalence rate of 14% in Saudi camels, 17.4% in Sudanese camels, 41.6% in Saudi Arabian camels and 12.5% in Pakistan camels, respectively.
The two species (E. dromedarii & E. cameli) included in the present study were formerly considered pathogenic species to young camel calves (Dia et al. 2002, Hussein et al. 1987). Therefore, the presence of these two pathogenic species of Eimeria showed that coccidiosis might be contributing to the enteric syndromes affecting young camel calves in this region. Hence, the aggregation of a range of age groups of camels was considered the most important factor influencing the prevalence of infection. Camel husbandry has been considered a sector of food supply for rural and sometimes urban people in this geographical region of Iran. Thus, their health status is important and epidemiological investigation on coccidia infections is useful for control purposes. From the information of recent investigation, it seems that Eimeria infection is a problem in camel husbandry in Tabriz suburb. Therefore, further investigations will reveal more information about economic effects of this parasite which it will be useful for establishing control programs.

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References


