INCIDENCE OF HELMINTHIC INFECTION AMONG ANNUALLY DEWORMED CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS

P.C. Saseendran¹, S. Rajendran², H. Subramanian³, M. Sasikumar², G. Vivek² and K.S. Anil ⁴

¹ Professor and Head, ² Postgraduate Scholar, ³ Assistant Professor, Department of Livestock Production Management; ⁴ Associate Professor and Head, Department of Veterinary Parasitology, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Mannuthy, Thrissur, Kerala 680651, India.

*Corresponding author: 13/9, Thiru. Vi. Ka. Street, Veerappan chatram, Erode, Tamil Nadu 638004, India.
Email: cvsrajesh@yahoo.co.in

Large number of elephants in captivity in Kerala are susceptible to a number of ailments, particularly parasitic diseases. Gastrointestinal nematodes in elephants are very common and have been responsible for frequent illness. Hence the present study was carried out to assess the prevalence of parasitic infections in captive elephants in the Punathoor Kotta of Guruvayoor Devasom Board, Guruvayoor (10°34'N, 76°0'E) which is a temple town in the coastal belt of Thrissur District, Kerala. The elephant camp has 58 elephants which have been dewormed annually for the past five years. Dung samples were collected from 44 and 55 elephants during the year 2000 and 2002 respectively. The collected dung samples were preserved in 10% formalin and brought to the laboratory for screening of parasitic eggs. The samples were examined by concentration and centrifugation method as per Georgi (1985).

Prevalence of parasitic infections in elephants is given in Table 1. Out of the 99 samples, 17 (17.17%) were positive for parasitic infection. During the year 2000, the incidence of parasitic infection was 22.73% whereas it was only 12.73% in 2002. Among the positive samples, 10 samples (10.10%) had strongyles and seven (7.07%) had amphistomes. Chakraborty and Islam (1996) and Gaur et al. (1979) had also reported the effectiveness of albendazole at 2.5 mg/kg body weight. Chandrasekharan (1992) and Suresh et al. (2001) had also reported the effectiveness of albendazole against strongylus in elephants. Therefore it is advisable to deworm elephants once in 6-12 months to prevent the harmful effects caused by parasites.

In all the previous studies, incidence of strongyle infection in captive elephants were reported to be high (Gaur et al., 1979; Chandrasekharan et al., 1982; Dutta & Bordoloi, 1989; Rao et al., 1992; Cheeran, 1999). Chandrasekharan (1992) reported 91.27% strongylus in captive elephants, maintained by the forest department. Suresh et al. (2001) recorded 63.64% and 87.5% strongylus at S.V. Dairy Farm, Tirupati and Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad respectively.

Amphistomosis were also identified by Huang (1981), Chandrasekharan et al. (1982) and Dutta and Bordoloi (1989). Chandrasekharan (1992) observed 17.85% amphistomosis in captive elephants, the prevalence being significantly higher than the present observation.

The low incidence of helminthic infection in Punathoor Kotto might be due to regular annual deworming with albendazole @ 2.5 mg/kg body weight. Chandrasekharan (1992) and Suresh et al. (2001) had also reported the effectiveness of albendazole against strongylus in elephants. Therefore it is advisable to deworm elephants once in 6-12 months to prevent the harmful effects caused by parasites.

Table 1. Prevalence of parasitic infection in captive elephants in Guruvayoor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of samples examined</th>
<th>No. of positive samples</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7 (15.91%)</td>
<td>10 (22.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3 (5.45%)</td>
<td>7 (12.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>10 (10.10%)</td>
<td>17 (17.17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


