

Dr Henk De Weerd

Answers Questions on Herpes I – Herpes II

This week we have had fanciers telephoning the clinic with bad cases of Canker in the mouth? This in all the instances has not been the case and further clinical examination of the youngsters has shown the symptoms of the Herpes Virus II.

What can you tell us about the Herpes Virus?

Herpes is a well known virus in humans, eg cold sores from drinking from a dirty infected glass. The virus always needs a location where there is less resistance locally or general. For that reason it can happen that people have a cold sore (herpes) several times a year. Herpes (Cold Sores) can be very painful with vesicles and crusts, as you may know. The simple fact that you may get a cold sore up to 3 times a year, means that the body does not build up a proper immunity, with this in mind it is inevitable that a vaccine will for sure never achieve immunity

How does Herpes affect pigeons?

The Virus needs a location where there is less resistance locally or generally.

What symptoms are normally associated with Herpes Virus?

Firstly the virus is always associated with the Ornithose complex. So looks like ornithosis. This can be caused (triggered) by a number of agents (infective) such as Chlamydia, mycoplasma etc, E.coli, streptococcus and staphylococcus can also play an important role. We also may find pigeons suffering from ornithosis have trichomoniasis (canker). It is not the Trichomoniasis as some believe that cause the Ornithosis. Most of these symptoms are easy to treat with antibiotics.

What is Herpes I and Herpes II

When we talk about the herpes virus, I differentiate old and young birds and therefore I have named them respectively Herpes I and Herpes II. Type I is the classic form as it is present in the ornithosis complex in old birds (and also young birds). But the big difference is that type II has only shown up in young birds. Type II is the dramatically deadly form.

Can old birds get the deadly Herpes II Virus?

I have followed this virus for 35 years and have only exceptionally found it once in the old birds about 30 years ago at a fancier in Deurne in Belgium.

What are the symptoms to look out for with the deadly Herpes II Virus?

The deadly herpes II virus shows 4 clear symptoms. If you have seen it once you will never forget it! Symptoms are:

1. The youngsters from 6 weeks look very sick normally hunched up in a corner out of the way on the floor.
2. The eyes are closed.
3. The birds do not eat or drink.
4. Produce slimy green droppings.

At that time the fancier thinks of E.coli, PPMV 1, Paratyphus (salmonella) or a severe form of canker (trichomoniasis). But all this is NOT the case. Because, when you open the beak of the pigeon then you see a very red throat with loose yellow pseudo membrane in the mouth. Moreover these pigeons have infections in both eyes often in combination with crusts (dried pus) between the eyelids

and a slowly sliding third eyelid (membrana nictitans) over the eyeball.

Is the yellow membrane a form of canker?

Many fanciers, and I am sorry to say also vets, then think, because of the yellow membranes in the beak (lesions) that we have a severe case of canker. On swab examination we sometimes then find (coincidentally) Trichomoniasis (Canker) under the microscope and the assumption is made. Pigeons at this stage will die without any chance to survive. The peculiar fact is that many times the nest mate of such a Herpes II pigeon also dies within a few weeks which means that they have already been infected by their parents in the nest.

How do the youngsters become infected?

In most cases where Young birds have not been out the loft or in contact with other birds the youngsters seem to be infected by their parents. This theory is enhanced as in a lot of cases you will find that the nest mate of a pigeon with Herpes II will also die a few weeks later. The parents are mostly in perfect condition and do not show any symptoms of this disease. This means that it requires more to get an outbreak.

How would you suggest to stop the spread of disease?

In our experience we have found a way to stop this disease once it is active in the young bird loft. It is very difficult to treat

pigeons that have already shown the clinical symptoms for 3 days as described above, but more or less we have a good prevention for the ones that are not yet clinically sick. The disease tends to spread slowly.

How does Herpes I affect old birds?

It has become popular to talk about Herpes in old pigeons when we see the yellow pseudo membranes in the beak, however this is a completely different clinical picture than described above in the young birds Herpes II situation because the old birds will not die.

What is the treatment for Herpes II?

During a period of over 30 years we experienced that by injecting all the non-clinically-sick pigeons with a certain antibiotic, nearly all the other pigeons then did not get the disease. The spread stopped almost immediately which means that there are important bacterial complications with the virus which make this clinical picture a confusing situation. Treatment of secondary infections is beneficial.

Does Vaccine against Herpes work?

We have tested a vaccine against Herpes about 25 years ago and again a more recent study. This was not a success. At present it can never be a success as the body cannot build up a natural immunity, therefore a vaccine will in my opinion never ever work.



For further advice please call Henk on 01206 842221

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