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118 – Duck viral enteritis

Introduction

Duck virus enteritis or duck plague is an acute, contagious disease of ducks, geese and swans which is caused by a herpesvirus that is also known as peste du canard and etenpest. The first outbreak of this disease was seen in 1923 in Holland.

The first outbreak in the USA was in 1967 and caused over $1,000,000 in the Long Island duck community.

Cause

Duck virus enteritis is caused by a herpesvirus of the alpha subfamily.

The disease

Duck virus enteritis can be transmitted by direct contact with infected wild ducks or by susceptible ducks coming into contact with an infected environment. Contaminated water is a natural vehicle for virus spread from infected to susceptible ducks.

A duck virus enteritis carrier state in wild ducks is thought to occur. In domestic ducks the incubation period is 3-7 days and death occurs 1-5 days after the first clinical signs. The first clinical sign in commercial ducks is often a high and persisting mortality. In laying flocks there is a marked drop in egg production and prolapsed phalluses are seen in dead mature males. As the disease progresses more signs are seen including half closed pasted eyelids, inappetence, thirst, ataxia, nasal discharge, soiled vents and a watery diarrhoea. Affected ducks can not stand – they have outstretched drooping wings with their heads held low.

Young ducklings are dehydrated, lose weight, have blue beaks, lacrimation, conjunctivitis, nasal exudate and some have blood stained vents. Mortality ranges from 5-100%, with adults showing the highest losses.

Post mortem findings

Necrotic degenerative changes are seen in the gastrointestinal tract and lymphoid and other organs. Haemorrhages are found on or in the heart muscle and various other organs. Diagnosis depend upon virus isolation although a presumptive diagnosis can be made on clinical signs and gross pathology.

The differential diagnosis includes duck virus hepatitis, fowl cholera, necrotic enteritis, coccidiosis, Newcastle disease, fowl plague and certain intoxications.

Treatment and control

There is no treatment and control/prevention relies on vaccination.