Update 2nd March 2017 Dr Hunnam

An Investigation of Rotavirus infection in Victorian pigeons by the Chief Veterinary Officer’s Unit ( CVOU )

During a recent visit to AgriBio, Dr Jaimie Hunnam indicated that the Chief Veterinary Officer's Unit (CVOU) would like to do an epidemiology survey of Rota virus in Victoria. Epidemiology is the study and analysis of the patterns, causes and effects of disease. It is the cornerstone of evidence-based medicine by identifying risk factors for disease and its prevention. The results of such a study would be invaluable to the pigeon fraternity because they will show us how the disease is spread, how it behaves generally and importantly indicate its weak points so that informed decisions can be made about its control. Dr Hunnam explained that the study would not be very expensive, perhaps $10,000 – 15,000. I explained that, although this was more than reasonable for the amount of work involved, we would regard this as quite a lot and that our focus and expenses had to be used on protecting the Australian flock through immunisation. Several weeks went by and I was re-contacted by Dr Hunnam. She explained that the CVOU understood the situation and was prepared to help us by doing the survey if the pigeon sport would cover the cost of postage and printing. This would work out at $2.50 /member.

Clubs are invited to consider this offer. The secretaries of all Victorian federations and clubs in due course will receive a letter inviting their members to participate. In those that do, then with time, each fancier will receive a questionnaire.

I feel that this is a fantastic opportunity and although there will be some fanciers who criticise this initiative (because there always are), I would encourage all fanciers to complete and return their questionnaire. This is an easy thing to do and the knowledge gained will help us all . So please spare the small amount of time involved for our mutual benefit.

Victorian DPI pigeon Rota virus survey - letter to club and federation secretaries

Once again the DPI is helping the Victorian pigeon community. A study is being undertaken by Dr Jaimie Hunnam of the Chief Veterinary Officer’s Unit (CVOU ) within the DPI to investigate the recent outbreak of Rota virus infection in Victorian pigeon lofts. The Victorian DPI has provided fantastic service to the pigeon fraternity right from the beginning of the Rota virus outbreak with its rapid diagnosis and more recently with supported diagnostic testing. This new initiative has many advantages for the Victorian pigeon community and will further assist in controlling and resolving this problem. Victorian fanciers are strongly encouraged to assist in the study.

The study will be designed to answer a number of questions, including the following:

1. Define what happens when Rota infects a loft. What can fanciers expect to see? How does the virus behave? What does it cause ? What signs do the birds show? How long does the disease last.? How old are affected birds? Do all birds that become unwell die? What signs might alert the fancier that his loft has the disease? What signs make it unlikely? Etc etc  
2. Confirm the true number of sick birds and mortality rates associated with rotavirus infection in Victorian pigeons  
3. Confirm that the source of rotavirus to Victorian pigeons was from birds/owners originating from Western Australia and investigate whether the Kyabram event was the point source of the outbreak  
4. Provide evidence on the source(s) of rotavirus transmission between lofts  
5. Identify potential management practices to help fanciers minimise the likelihood of entry of rotavirus and to minimise the impact of rotavirus within a loft (e.g. stress minimisation; feed practices; biosecurity etc)  
6. Track the movement of rotavirus in pigeons across the State, both in time and space  
7. Assess the level of contact of pigeons with other bird and animal species, to determine the true likelihood of rotavirus transmission

How will the study be done ?

Within the proposed study, a questionnaire will be posted to all pigeon loft owners/fanciers in Victoria. In order to maintain the confidentiality of owners, the questionnaires will be provided to appropriate pigeon associations, with a cover letter, questionnaire and reply postage-paid envelope. The associations will be asked to apply an address sticker from their membership list, with the reply address to Agriculture Victoria. As the response rate from postal questionnaires can be as low as 10%, it is preferable that all loft owners in Victoria receive a copy by post. Loft owners will not be asked for their contact details and will only need to describe their location to the parish-level. Fanciers whose lofts have been diagnosed with the disease will be sent an additional in-depth questionnaire and/or will complete a phone interview..  
Results of the study will be made available to the pigeon community.

It would be very much appreciated by the DPI if the Victorian pigeon industry would consider contributing to the costs involved in undertaking this project. This would predominately involve the costs of postage and materials which have been estimated at approximately $2.50 per owner . There is no cost to the pigeon fraternity for the actual study and results generated. This represents a tremendous opportunity to obtain a lot of accurate information about this disease in OUR state

It would be appreciated if secretaries could send their mailing address and number of required questionnaire copies to Dr Hunnam. Her details are below

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