**UPDATE 22 JULY 2017**

**More Fake News**

I have had a few CCF fanciers contact me today saying that there is a rumour going around that the Rota virus that we are currently dealing with in Australia has been in Europe for over 20 years. This is most definitely not the case. When the condition was first diagnosed in February in Melbourne all the experts at Latrobe University and Agribio did an extensive search of the veterinary literature. This disease has NOT been recorded before. There were a number of papers written throughout the 1990’s that describe a necrotising hepatitis in pigeons. These cases were all due to Adeno virus type 2. There were also cases of other types of Rota virus being identified in pigeons. Their significance was unclear but it was thought that these viruses may have been associated with mild diarrhoea. Since February there has been correspondence with  the Federation Columbophile International  (FCI)and particularly German researchers which confirms the results of the veterinary literature search. The Rota virus we are now dealing with is a new Rota virus to the world and the disease it causes is a new disease. No previous  Rota virus has been identified as causing a necrotising hepatitis.

I am disappointed that people feel the need to disseminate such information. They are misinformed and to spread rumours such as these is pointless.

**Yet More Fake News**

Another bit of fake news “doing the rounds” is that the vaccine will not be available for years. A very common question at the moment is “When will the vaccine be available ?” This is reasonable. For many people the choices are either “sit tight” and wait for the vaccine or use the “ Poovac”.  Fanciers  also want to know if the vaccine will be available in time to vaccinate this year’s babies, particularly if they were to pair up  a bit later. I wish I could be specific but what our team in Melbourne and Dr Mark White has said is that the vaccine is likely to be available by the end of the year and if there are unforeseen difficulties by Feb/March 2018. We are still on track for this. At one stage it looked as if the vaccine could be available as early as July and we let fanciers know this. The need  to give a booster  and wait for IgY levels to rise pushed this back. Vaccines are not easy. There is no vaccine for AIDS or TB. Fanciers need to remember that it was only in March (after it became apparent that none of the available vaccines conferred cross immunity) that we realised that we would have to make a vaccine. Not an undertaking taken lightly. To think that by July we have one is  a testament to the skill and dedication of the team in Melbourne and the support of the Board. Fanciers can be assured that everything is progressing as fast as it can and that fanciers will be kept up to date with progress through this site. The National Board and our team in Melbourne  will be pleased to offer to the pigeon fanciers of Australia a vaccine as a means of protecting their birds.

I would also remind fanciers that the vaccine is a sub unit vaccine. It is not a live modified vaccine (like Pox, some overseas PMV and Salmonella vaccines) where birds are actually given a mild dose of the disease. Similarly it is not a killed vaccine (like PMV) where the virus is all there but dead. It is a sub unit vaccine. This means that the vaccine just contains the bit of protein from the virus that stimulates immunity.  With the production of a sub unit vaccine there is no risk of incomplete inactivation or reversion to virulence, it is controlled and repeatable, the bird is only exposed to the relevant part of the virus, it avoids induction of an immune response to the whole virus -  many parts of which are irrelevant, parts of the virus that suppress an immune response are avoided and the vaccine can be more easily altered if the virus changes. This is why sub unit vaccines are so safe. It is also why they are so effective and partially explains why the recently reported results showed that vaccinated birds had higher immunity than recovered naturally infected birds. In the Rota  vaccine that Australian fanciers will have access to, the birds are getting a pure protein that stimulates immunity without any side-effects.

Some fanciers, for reasons that are totally unclear to me, seem against the production of a vaccine. I don’t know why. No one is going to force a fancier to use the vaccine. The end result of our work will simply be that a vaccine will be available if fanciers wish to use it. For me, however, the choice as to whether or not to use the vaccine is a “no brainer”. It will be a safe, effective way of providing a predictable amount of immunity for a predictable period of time without any of the side effects of virus exposure. It will enable fanciers to start a race season and mate stock birds knowing that their birds are safe against the disease. It will enable one-loft races to safely occur and for studs to sell birds and fanciers to  exchange birds with confidence. In short, it will enable our sport to go back to a pre-Rota time , the way it was in early 2016. Surely that is a good thing

Dealing with this whole Rota thing has opened my eyes to the personalities of some people and unfortunately not for the good. My feeling is that we are all in this together with the goal being to discover the facts about this virus and the disease it causes and figure out a way of keeping our birds well. What I have found is that some people develop a particular point of view. Anyone who holds a view that is different from theirs is then regarded as the “enemy” and conflicts start. Unfortunately most of the information that has started these conflicts has not been based on fact. This means that  arguments right from the start are flawed.  The above 2 fake news items are good examples of this. I could “rub my crystal ball” now and predict that, even though it looks like we are going to produce an excellent vaccine in a remarkably short period of time at an affordable price, the very day it is released there will be people  who will be critical of it: they will say, without knowing the facts,  that it does not work, it is harmful or whatever, but in their minds there will be something wrong with it. I have no idea what their agenda is but I would encourage fanciers to keep an open mind and let’s all get back to just enjoying our sport.

**Treatment Summary**

How to treat Rota birds is another common question. More detail is found in earlier Updates  in February and March, however in summary:-

1/ Probiotics on the food – drip a seed oil (eg canola oil) onto the seed until the grain looks clean and polished, don’t make it “gluggy”. Add the probiotic at the dose on the label. The dose of Probac Soluble is a ½ measure to 1 kg of seed

2/ Electrolyte /rehydrating  preparation in the water.  eg Electrolyte P180  1 measure to 4 L of water

Any registered preparation can be used but do use a registered preparation

Remember this is a viral disease. Very few Rota birds have secondary bacterial infections that respond to antibiotics. To  reduce the severity of symptoms and the number of mortalities there is much more benefit in  giving the flock electrolyte/rehydrating preparations

3/ With severely affected birds – separate , place in a warm ( but not hot ) location ( a basket in the house can make a good temporary hospital). Crop feed with Passwells Hand Rearing Food. This is a high energy, vitamin rich, easy to digest convalescent food that is cheap and widely available. Dilute 1 part powder to 4 -6 parts warm water and give 10 mls at a time. Give further feeds as the crop is emptied. These individual sick birds can benefit from antibiotics ( eg 0.4 ml Baytril once daily) and something for canker ( eg 1 Spartix, 1 Ronsec or ¼ Flagyl 200mg once daily )

Severely affected birds can be returned to the loft as they recover. Keep the loft on probiotics and electrolyte/rehydrating preparations until there is a period of 2 days without symptoms ( vomiting and diarrhoea )