

***Baylisascaris* and you: A study of exposure and risk factors in wildlife rehabilitators**

- *Baylisascaris procyonis*, or the raccoon roundworm, is a zoonotic parasite (transmits from animals to humans) and an emerging disease.
- Adult *B. procyonis* lives in the intestines of infected raccoons and eggs are shed in the feces.
- Humans and other animals become infected upon ingesting the eggs, after which the larvae hatch and migrate through the host's body to sites including the brain, eyes, and visceral organs.
- Clinical disease from *B. procyonis* has been reported about 30 times in the medical literature. All patients either died or had permanent neurologic defects.
- However, this disease may be more common than assumed. If few eggs are ingested, then the infection may be asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic and misdiagnosed.

Our Study

The Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study of the University of Georgia, in collaboration with the CDC's Parasitic Diseases Branch, is conducting a study to assess the exposure of wildlife rehabilitators to *B. procyonis*. We are administering a questionnaire to assess risk factors, and testing serum samples for antibodies to *B. procyonis* indicating exposure.

So far, 19 out of 273 (7%) of our participants have tested positive for antibodies to *B. procyonis*. While complete analysis of risk factors is premature, we can make some recommendations to reduce risk, including:

- Glove use and washing after handling feces.
- Heat-sterilization of enclosures.
- Avoiding wood and plastic in enclosure construction, as these are difficult to sterilize properly.
- De-worm all raccoons at a young age to prevent shedding of eggs.
- Minimize presence of wild raccoons around homes, especially in high-risk areas.

Moving Forward...

We are also conducting a survey to assess the current knowledge and understanding of *B. procyonis* within the rehab community. The survey can be accessed online at the following link: https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cN5zJHhNNA9poDr

Your interest and participation is much appreciated! For more information or if you have further questions, please contact Dr. Michael Yabsley (myabsley@uga.edu) or Sarah Sapp (sgsapp@uga.edu).

