ARTÍCULO ORIGINAL

Presence of Gasterophilus (Leach, 1817) (Diptera: Oestridae) in horses in Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

With the purpose of verify the presence of larvae from the genus Gasterophilus in the Rio Grande do Sul State, a study was undertaken using 395 horses taken to slaughter in the city of Pelotas. The material analysis revealed that 126 animals (31.90%) presented infection, with 100 animals (25.32%) infected by Gasterophilus nasalis, and 47 animals (11.90%) infected by G. intestinalis. These results also represent the first report of the definite establishment of G. intestinalis as a horse parasite in Brazil. The probable implications of G. intestinalis occurrence in Brazil are discussed.

Key words: Gasterophilus; G. nasalis; G. intestinalis.

INTRODUCTION

The genus Gasterophilus (Diptera, Oestridae) includes eight species of flies whose larvae cause gastrointestinal myiasis in equids1. In Brazil Gasterophilus intestinalis De Geer, 17762 and Gasterophilus nasalis Linnaeus 17583 were the two species described until now.

The myiasis develops for a period of 10 to 12 months in different regions of the equine digestive tract4. G. nasalis larvae of second and third instar (L2 and L3) are found in the pylorus and first portion of the duodenum, immediately after the pyloric sphincter5, whereas L2 and L3 larvae from G. intestinalis are usually found in the non-glandular portion of the stomach.

Generally, gasterophilosis manifests with dysphagia, gastric and intestinal ulceration, gastric obstruction or volvulus, rectal prolapse, anemia, diarrhea, and other digestive problems6.

Apart from the losses caused to equids, there are reports of infections caused by gasterophilids in dogs, pigs, birds7 and human beings8.

Studies on the occurrence and prevalence of the genus Gasterophilus undertaken in Brazil suggest just the presence of G. Nasalis9-15. The occurrence of G. intestinalis has been reported, in isolated cases of imported animals2,16, and therefore the species is not yet considered as established in Brazil14.

The updating of the general occurrence and seasonal occurrence of the genus Gasterophilus in Brazil is important, not only to help the clinical diagnosis and control planning of gasterophilosis, but also from a biological and ecological point of view9.

This study reports the occurrence of gasterophilids in horses slaughtered at a slaughterhouse in Rio Grande do Sul State, and
indicates the establishment of *G. intestinalis* in Brazil.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The stomachs of 395 horses were analyzed after slaughter at a commercial slaughterhouse in the city of Pelotas, Rio Grade do Sul. The studied horses were from different regions of the State. The city of origin and the sex of each animal were registered, but no specification was made as to breed or age.

After the evisceration, the animals’ stomachs were opened on the greater curvature, from the cardia to the pylorus, together with the first portion of the duodenum; these were examined in search for the larval forms of *Gasterophilus* spp. When found, the point of fixation (cardia, non-glandular region, glandular region, pilorum-duodenum) was registered and the sample was collected and stored individually. These samples were taken immediately to the laboratory, where they were weighed and identified by appropriate keys⁴ (Figure 1).

**RESULTS**

The findings on the slaughtered animals are presented in Table 1. A hundred and twenty six (31,90%) out of 395 animals were infected by *Gasterophilus* sp. larvae. Of the overall animals infected, males were more parasitised than females, both in relation to the total of males (34,57%) as well as the total of positive animals (66,66%).

The infection by species and region (mesoregion, Figure 2) of the Rio Grande do Sul State is presented in Table 2. Findings showed 100 (77,34%) horses infected by *G. nasalis* and 47 (48,44%) horses infected by *G. intestinalis*. Of the animals presenting the disease, 107 (83,59%) were suffering the infection of only one species, and 21 (16,41%) presented larvae of both species.

A total of 1,451 larvae of second and third instars was collected, with a mean of 10,97 larvae per animal. Of the total larvae found, 760 (52,38%) were of *G. nasalis* and 691 (47,62%), of *G. intestinalis*.

Horses infected by gasterophilids were found in all the mesoregions of the State of Rio Grade do Sul (Table 3). The infection of horses by *G. nasalis* was identified in 24 municipalities, and the infection by *G. intestinalis* was found in 19 municipalities.

The necropsy of the animals revealed that

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**Table 1. Number and percentage of horses with gasterophilosis according to sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>PG¹ (%)</th>
<th>NG² (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>34.57</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27.63</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>31.90</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹- PG: Positive for gasterophilosis; 2- NG: Negative for gasterophilosis.

**Table 2. Regional distribution of the number and percentage of gasterophilids found in horse slaughtered in Rio Grande do Sul**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Gn² (%)</th>
<th>Gi³ (%)</th>
<th>1 sp⁴ (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>3 15.79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 15.79</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>7 24.14</td>
<td>4 13.79</td>
<td>9 31.03</td>
<td>1 3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central¹</td>
<td>12 27.27</td>
<td>2 4.55</td>
<td>12 27.27</td>
<td>1 2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>40 28.78</td>
<td>17 12.23</td>
<td>43 30.94</td>
<td>7 5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>29 22.48</td>
<td>19 14.73</td>
<td>26 20.16</td>
<td>11 8.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>9 25.71</td>
<td>5 14.29</td>
<td>12 34.29</td>
<td>1 2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 25.32</td>
<td>47 11.90</td>
<td>105 26.58</td>
<td>21 5.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹- Mid Occidental & Mid Oriental; 2- Gn: *Gasterophilus nasalis*; 3- Gi: *Gasterophilus intestinalis*; 4- sp.: species.
Table 3. Regional distribution of the number and percentage of gasterophilosis positive horses from a slaughterhouse in Rio Grande do Sul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>PG² (%)</th>
<th>NG³ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central³</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29.55</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>35.97</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>28.68</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>31.90</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1- Mid Occidental & Mid Oriental; 2- PG: Positive for gasterophilosis; 3- NG: Negative for gasterophilosis.

Table 4. Number and percentage of gasterophilids found per horse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gasterophilids/ Infestation</th>
<th>Horses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 1 to 20</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 20 to 50</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 50 to 100</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; than 100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this study show that, *G. nasalis* is not the only species of the *Gasterophilus* genus acclimatised in Brazil. Differing from former studies⁹,¹⁰,¹³-¹⁵ this work shows that *G. intestinalis* has definitely established in Brazil. This was confirmed by the presence of the parasite in different municipalities of the whole state, and in Rio Grande do Sul born horses.

The great prevalence of the infection by *G. nasalis* both in relation to the *G. intestinalis*, as well as the number of infected animals and the number of collected larvae, can indicate a process of adaptation of the later species. In Italy it was found a predominance of *G. intestinalis* (95.2%) over *G. nasalis* (44.8%)¹. These results were similar to the ones previously found in the State of Victoria, southeast Australia¹⁷, where the infections were 81% by *G. intestinalis* and 29%

![Figure 1. Gasterophilus nasalis (left) and Gasterophilus intestinalis (right) recovered from horses in Rio Grande do Sul.](image1)

![Figure 2. Mesoregions of the Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil.](image2)
by *G. nasalis*. The predominance of *G. intestinalis*, can be related to the preference of this parasite for the stomach, favouring its access to food, and increasing its biotic potential\(^1\).

*Gasterophilus intestinalis* has a worldwide distribution, with a greater number of reports in temperate regions of central Europe, and south-southeast United States, and increasing in periods of lower temperatures in Europe\(^1\), Australia\(^17\) and Jordan\(^18\).

The climatic situation of the State of Victoria, in Australia, is similar to that of Rio Grande do Sul, with humid winters and temperatures lower than the national average, period of increased *G. intestinalis* occurrence\(^17\). In Chile the first evidences of *G. intestinalis* was registered in the VIII region (Biobío)\(^19\), by the identification of eggs of this parasite in the hairs around the horses’ mouth, and that the occurrence of this species is grater in winter. Thus, considering the biological and geographic aspects commented above, *G. intestinalis* has potential to become the most prevalent species of the genus in Rio Grande do Sul, and move on to the other states, especially those that have an annual mean temperature lower than Brazilian’s one.

Apart from the difference in the prevalence of both species, the parasitism by *G. intestinalis* is worrisome from the clinical point of view, as there are many reports of severe digestive complications caused by this parasite\(^20\)-\(^22\).

Further studies are being conducted to describe the ecology of these parasites, and monitor their occurrence in other Brazilian states or South American countries. However, the authors suggest that immediate preventive measures be taken to control the advance of the introduced species in Brazil.

**RESUMO**

Com o objetivo de verificar a presença de larvas do gênero *Gasterophilus* no Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, foi realizado um estudo com 395 equinos sacrificados em um abatedouro da cidade de Pelotas. O material analisado revelou que 126 animais (31,90%) apresentaram a infecção, sendo que 100 animais (25,32%) estavam infectados por *Gasterophilus nasalis* e 47 (11,90%) por *G. intestinalis*. Estes resultados também representam o primeiro relato definitivo de estabelecimento de *G. intestinalis* como parasito de equinos no Brasil. As implicações prováveis da presença de *G. intestinalis* no Brasil são discutidas.

**REFERENCES**


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