

# Parasite Forecast

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Issue 17

Autumn 2021

# Welcome


Welcome to the ESCCAP UK & Ireland quarterly newsletter. The Government has opened up a consultation period on its proposed legislation to change the rules regarding pet travel and importation into the UK. This has focused on the key welfare issues of ear cropping and tail docking as well as raising the minimum age of importation to 6 months.

These measures are likely to have a major impact on animal welfare and the illegal importation of puppies and are fully supported by ESCCAP UK & Ireland. This is also surely an opportunity to consider what other treatments and tests are desirable to make legal requirements for pets being imported into the country. Increasing reports of *Brucella canis* and *Leishmania* positive dogs make for an increasingly compelling case to introduce mandatory testing for these pathogens. Both are zoonotic with potential to establish in the UK over time.

The compulsory tapeworm treatment for *Echinococcus* also remains essential before UK entry for dogs but there is also a strong argument for reintroducing the compulsory tick treatment. While this will only prevent the entry of ticks and tick-borne pathogens as part of a group of measures, dropping the treatment sent out the wrong message to pet owners regarding the importance of tick prevention. This consultation period is the perfect opportunity to lobby your MP and support lobbying veterinary groups such as the BVA to get these changes made. Legislation is only however, one component of biosecurity, pet and animal health. ESCCAP UK & Ireland will continue to help veterinary professionals to educate the public so they can put effective parasite prevention measures in place when travelling with their pets or adopting from abroad.

If anyone has any ideas which promotes increased parasite testing in practice, then please get in touch. We welcome any query, large or small, via our website at [www.esccapuk.org.uk](http://www.esccapuk.org.uk)

To your parasite control success!

 Ian Wright  
Head of ESCCAP UK & Ireland



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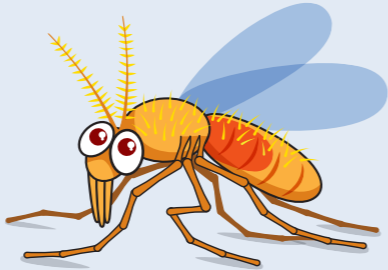
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## Autumn 2021 Parasite Forecast

### Exotic disease in imported dogs from Eastern and Southern Europe

As the numbers of rescue dogs being imported remains high throughout the current crisis, it is vital that vets and nurses remain vigilant for clinical signs that might indicate exotic parasite infection and that relevant screening tests are carried out.



Sandflies are the vectors for *Leishmania* spp.

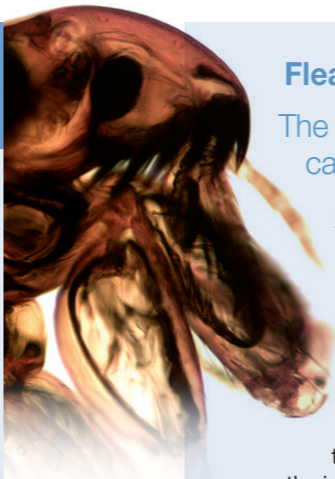
Heartworm and *Leishmania* cases reported to ESCCAP UK & Ireland continue to be imported from a wide variety of countries both inside and outside Europe.

ESCCAP UK & Ireland continues to recommend four key steps (the “four pillars”) in all imported dogs. These are:

1. **Checking for ticks and subsequent identification.**
2. **Treating dogs with praziquantel within 30 days of returning to the UK in addition to the compulsory treatment, and treating for ticks if a tick treatment is not in place.**
3. **Recognising clinical signs relevant to diseases present in the countries visited or country of origin.**
4. **Screening for *Leishmania*, heartworm and exotic tick-borne disease in imported dogs.**

We are often asked about routine screening for parasites in imported dogs and which tests we would recommend. The new pet travel and importation guideline from ESCCAP will be launched in the next 12 months but in the meantime, for dogs imported into the UK, we would recommend the following tests:

- *Leishmania* – quantitative serology, PCR
- Heartworm – Antigen blood test, Knott’s test
- *Ehrlichia canis* and *Anaplasma* – serology, PCR
- *Hepatozoon canis* – blood smear, PCR
- *Babesia* – PCR
- *Brucella canis* – consult your external lab for suitable test



### Fleas

The Big Flea Project has found 28.1% of cats and 14.4% of dogs positive for fleas.

<https://parasitesandvectors.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13071-019-3326-x>

11.3% of these infested pets were found to be harbouring fleas infected with *Bartonella* and 5% with *Rickettsia felis*, both zoonotic pathogens. They are of particular significance in the immune suppressed, making flea control vital in these groups, especially if self-isolating. More data from the big flea project has been published demonstrating the importance of pet owner education and compliance in adequate flea control <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/mve.12462>. A wide range of treatment outcomes regarding flea control was observed across a variety of products. As there is still no evidence of flea resistance causing flea control breakdown in the field it is likely that compliance and owner education is playing a significant part in these differences. The study emphasises the importance of continued monitoring for the efficacy of flea treatments alongside owner engagement and education. Year-round flea treatment for cats and dogs remains essential because:

1. **Exposure to fleas is ubiquitous with no single group of pets being at significantly decreased risk compared to others.**
2. **Exposure occurs all year round and if you wait until flea infestations establish then they take months to eliminate, resulting in increased morbidity and discomfort for pets and owners as well as increased zoonotic pathogen exposure.**
3. **If veterinary professionals don’t recommend year-round flea treatment for cats and dogs then infestations will occur leading to many pet owners seeking flea products elsewhere, often without correct application advice (how to apply without spillage, avoid swimming, shampooing etc.), leading to more environmental contamination and not less.**

### Lungworm

Warm and humid weather for the time of year is likely to result in extended seasonal slug activity. Veterinary professionals should therefore continue to be vigilant for cases of *Angiostrongylus vasorum* in their area and advise preventative treatment for high-risk dogs (previously infected dogs, those dogs living in close proximity to other cases, those coprophagic, eating slugs, snails, grass and amphibians).



ESCCAP UK & Ireland supports a risk-based approach to prevention and information regarding regional prevalence is key to this. Routine testing of dogs for *A. vasorum* alongside those dogs with relevant clinical signs enables practices to establish if *A. vasorum* is present in their area as well as demonstrating efficacy of control plans if dogs are already on preventative treatment. Research has recently been published confirming the infectivity of L3 *Angiostrongylus vasorum* and *Crenosoma vulpis* larvae shed from gastropods <https://parasitesandvectors.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13071-021-04802-6>. While the significance of this route in field conditions is still unknown, this study demonstrates the potential for dogs to be infected from slime trails and water visited by slugs. As well as a preventative treatment for dogs whose geographical location and lifestyle puts them at risk from exposure from *A. vasorum*, simple precautions such as bringing in toys, food and water bowls indoors at night and avoiding walking after periods of rain (not always easy in the UK!) will also help to minimise any risk of transmission by this route.

### Tick-borne disease

Tick-borne encephalitis virus has established in the UK

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-50206382>



*Ixodes ricinus*

While pets and their owners should continue to enjoy the beautiful New and Thetford forests where there is evidence for establishment, the need for effective tick prevention has never been more important for those pets and people working there and using the areas for regular recreational activity. The UK climate continues to allow questing and feeding of *Ixodes* ticks all year round, with high levels of activity throughout the summer (<http://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/vr.104649>). The mild AND HUMID Autumn is likely to extend peak tick questing times. Checking for and removing ticks within 24 hours and using an effective product that will rapidly kill or repel ticks, will greatly reduce the risk of transmission for pets and owners walking in high-risk areas such as outdoor areas with tall grass, bracken and those shared with deer or ruminants. Pets with a previous history of tick exposure should also be treated as it is likely their lifestyle will expose them to ticks again in the future.

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### *Toxocara canis*

There remains no current data on the prevalence or incidence of human toxocarosis in the UK. The recorded prevalence of patent infection in untreated UK adult cats and dogs, however, continues to be high (5% dogs, 26% cats, most recent figures from Lancashire, 6% dogs, 32% cats most recent figures from Ireland).



*Toxocara* adult worm (Image courtesy of Pedro Serra/NWL labs)

Due to the zoonotic risk this represents, and the potential for all cats and dogs to be infected, ESCCAP UK & Ireland continues to advise all UK cats and dogs are treated at least every 3 months to reduce egg shedding and high-risk groups (those cats and dogs on raw unprocessed diets, those that hunt, those living with children or immune-compromised adults) should be treated monthly. A recent survey of UK pet owners suggests that worm treatment frequency in cats and dogs is much lower than this <https://parasitesandvectors.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13071-020-04086-2>. Routine testing for intestinal parasites is important to help fill national data gaps in worm prevalence while also demonstrating the efficacy of current treatment plans.



### *Echinococcus granulosus*

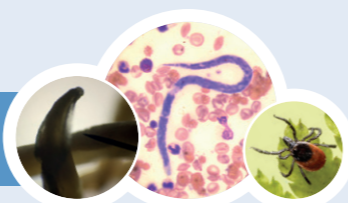
Although there is evidence for the presence of *E. granulosus* in England and mainland Scotland, its distribution outside of endemic foci in Wales and the Western Isles of Scotland is unknown. Post-mortem inspections in abattoirs across Britain have produced positive cases with a particularly high incidence on the Welsh border and North Midlands.

HyData UK is a multi-centre collaborative study investigating the national distribution of *E. granulosus* in high-risk dog populations (hunting hounds, farm dogs and pet dogs in rural areas), livestock (cattle, sheep) and horses at slaughter in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Using a molecular epidemiological approach and GIS methodology, the study aims to build a more comprehensive picture of *E. granulosus* geographic distribution in the UK. Until these results become available, prevention advice to pet owners must be based on the lifestyle risk of the pet, including:

1. Monthly treatment with praziquantel of all dogs in known hydatid endemic areas unless kept on leads and fed cooked diets.
2. Monthly treatment with praziquantel for any dogs outside these areas shedding *Taenia* tapeworm segments (the risk factors for *Taenia* and *E. granulosus* infection are broadly the same), fed raw offal/unprocessed raw diets or have access to fallen livestock.
3. At least 4 times a year praziquantel treatment for dogs in non-endemic areas that are out of sight off the lead with potential pasture access.
4. Promotion of anti-dog fouling, keeping dogs on leads around farms and livestock, and promotion of adequately frozen or cooked diets.

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## Latest news from ESCCAP UK & Ireland

### Government consultation on changes to pet travel and importation response

In response to the Governments consultation on proposed changes to pet travel and importation, ESCCAP UK & Ireland have submitted the following response.

“ESCCAP UK & Ireland fully supports the Government’s proposed rule changes intended to crack down on the illegal importation of cats, dogs and ferrets. Banning the importation of dogs with cropped ears and docked tails is to be welcomed and raising the minimum importation age to 6 months will have a marked impact on the illegal puppy trade.

This is also an opportunity, however, to examine the rules regarding the testing of imported dogs for exotic pathogens, particularly those with zoonotic potential. In the light of increased cases of *Brucella canis* in imported dogs, ESCCAP UK & Ireland calls upon the Government to make *Brucella* testing compulsory in dogs imported into the UK from endemic countries. This would also be an opportunity to reintroduce compulsory tick treatment which, while only one of several measures required to prevent the establishment of tick-borne pathogens, would help to slow this process.

UK household infestations with *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, endemic foci of *Babesia canis* and tick-borne encephalitis virus in the south of England, have demonstrated how important an effective policy to prevent tick-borne pathogen establishment in the UK is. The Government might also consider compulsory testing for *Dirofilaria immitis*, *Leishmania infantum* and *Ehrlichia canis* which can all have a devastating impact on dogs’ lives months or years after initial importation.”

We encourage anyone with an interest in pet travel, importation and disease prevention to engage with the consultation. More information can be found online at

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/pet-travel-and-imports-team/pet-travel>



## ESCCAP UK & Ireland website forum

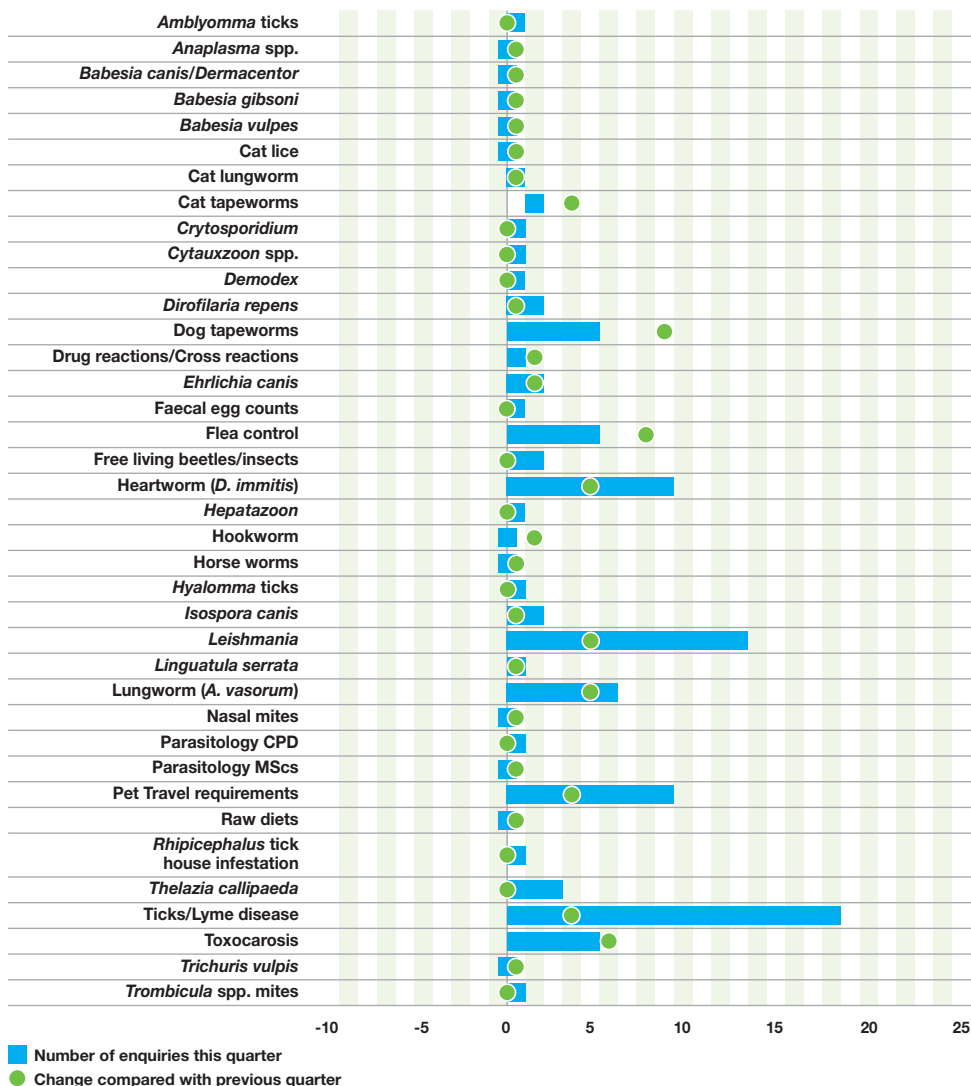


If you have any issues you’d like to discuss surrounding parasites, control protocols, pet travel and importation, or post images of parasites for colleagues and ESCCAP UK & Ireland experts to identify, then please visit the forum and start a discussion.

# ESCCAP UK & Ireland Enquiries

ESCCAP UK & Ireland has continued to receive a large number of queries from Veterinary professionals and the public regarding a wide range of subjects in the last 3 months.

Queries regarding UK tick and Lyme disease have predominated. Although this summer has been exceptionally dry, conditions in grass and vegetation have remained humid enough for ticks to remain active with numerous reports of tick attachments on dogs reported to us. Queries surrounding the management of *Leishmania infantum* and heartworm remain high as increasing numbers of infected imported dogs are brought into the UK. This is a reflection of the increasing numbers of dogs being imported into the UK from endemic countries. As Covid travel restrictions are gradually lifted, queries regarding pet travel requirements are also increasing. Although a lot of focus has been on the new animal health certificate rules for pets travelling to Europe, preventative treatments for ticks, sand flies, tapeworm and heartworm remains essential when travelling to endemic countries.



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