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CARDIOVASCULAR CALCIFICATION ASSOCIATED WITH NEPHRITIS IN A BADGER

L. KARSTAD¹ and M. W. LANKESTER²

Abstract: Calcification of the endocardium of the left atrium, and to a lesser extent the media of the pulmonary artery and aorta, was found associated with nephritis in a badger (*Taxidea taxus*).

CASE REPORT

A male badger, approximately 8 months old and weighing 5 kg, was trapped at Hartney, Manitoba, on December 10, 1971. Age was determined by weight and tooth examination. The carcass was frozen and thawed before necropsy. Creamy coloured plates of hard material were found deposited in the endocardium of the left atrium and extending into the pulmonary veins for a distance of 1.5 cm (Fig. 1). There were no erosions nor evidence of inflammation. The kidneys were about twice normal size, and on their cortical surfaces there were scattered white pin-point sized lesions.

Histological examination of the heart and kidneys was made, employing both frozen sections and sections cut after routine paraffin-embedding. Frozen sections were stained with oil-red-O for fat and the paraffin-embedded tissues were stained with haematoxylin and eosin, and by the methods of Verhoef-Van Gieson, periodic acid-Schiff (PAS) and Von Kossa. In addition to the endocardial lesions, there were focal lesions also in the media of the aorta, where it was sectioned near the base of the heart, and more extensive plate-like lesions in the media of the pulmonary artery (Fig. 2). Presumptive identification of calcium in these lesions was made by staining with Von Kossa (Fig. 3). The calcification was associated with fibroelastic tissue which was identified by the Verhoef-Van Gieson and PAS staining methods.

In most of the lesions, the deposits of calcium salts were massive but in some of the smaller focal lesions in the aorta, the calcium was deposited on intact elastic fibers. Fat was not demonstrable, except as normally present in fat tissue associated with the epicardium.

The kidney tissues had been severely damaged by freezing and thawing but in spite of this, irregular and focal cellular infiltrations could be seen. The cells in these infiltrations could be identified only as "round cells", presumably large mononuclear leukocytes. These cellular infiltrates separated or replaced the normal tubular elements. In the cortex, they were focal but larger wedge-shaped lesions extended into the medulla. Fibrosis was minimal, as evidenced by fine strands of peritubular collagen in areas adjacent to the cellular infiltrates.

DISCUSSION

Calcification of the endocardium of the left atrium has been described in dogs with renal insufficiency.² Sometimes the aorta also has been found to be affected. Similar lesions in the badger, accompanied by swollen, nephritic kidneys, suggests that in this case too, uremia was the probable cause. The largely carnivorous, high-protein diet of the badger may have been a predisposing factor. It seems that the dystrophic calcification had not yet influenced appreciably the physical condition of the ani-

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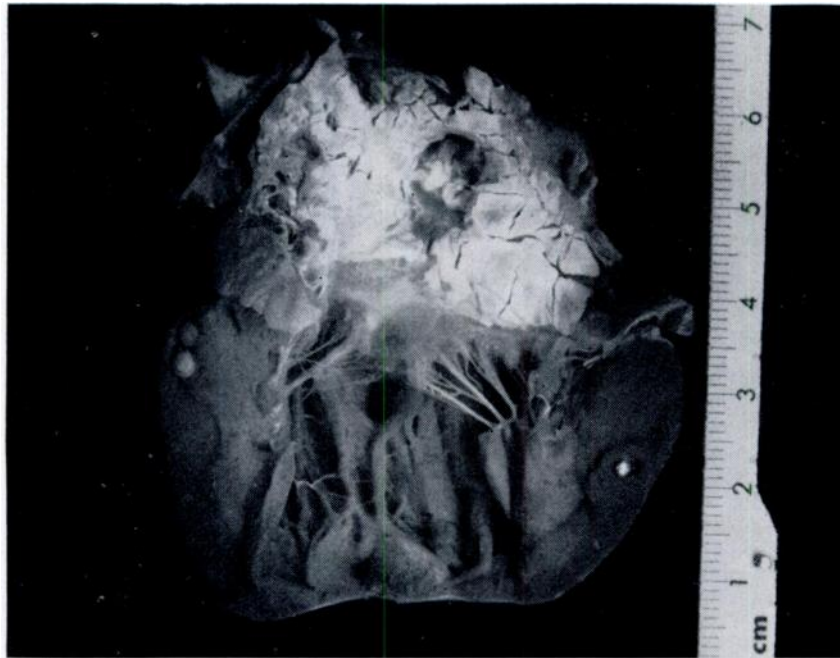


FIGURE 1. Gross appearance of endocardial calcification in the left atrium of a badger. The round objects in ventricle walls are pin heads.

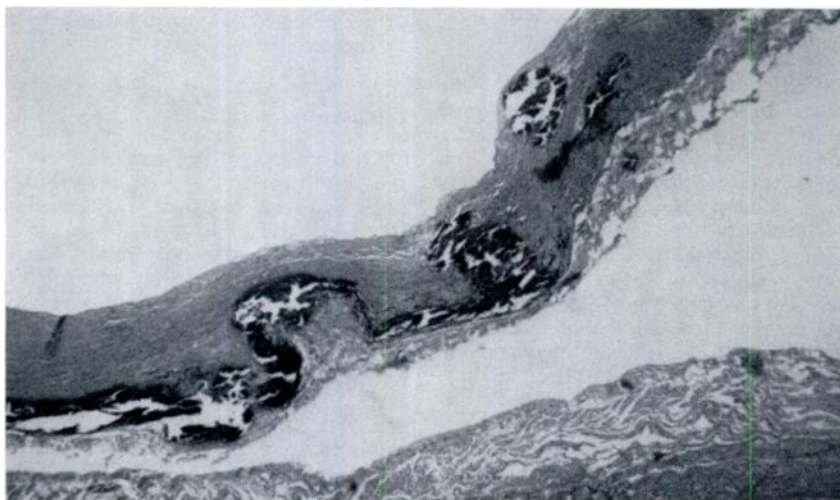


FIGURE 2. Calcification (black) of the media of the pulmonary artery. Von Kossa x 100.

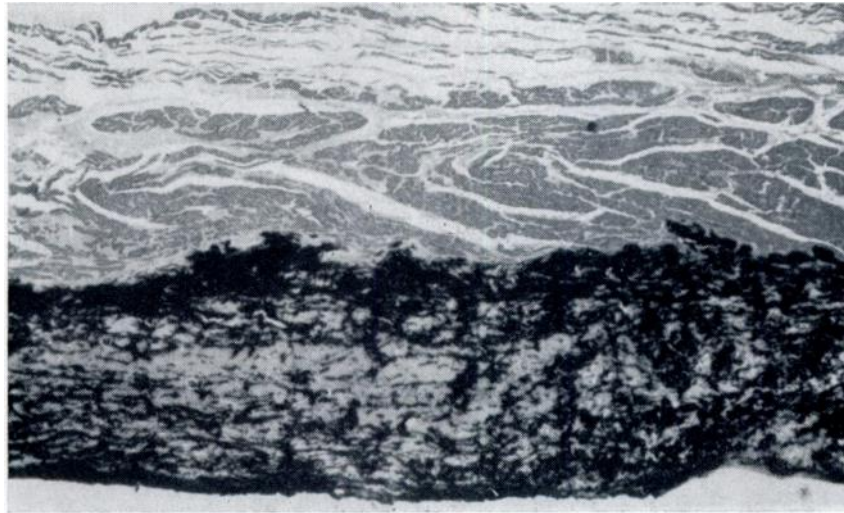


FIGURE 3. Calcium deposits (black) in fibroelastic tissue of the endocardium, left atrium. Von Kossa x 100.

mal, for it was in good flesh, well developed, and of normal weight. (Two other male badgers of approximately the same age weighed 5.1 and 6.3 kg, respectively). Whether lesions would have been progressive can only be a matter for speculation. The etiology of the nephritis was not determined. Although leptospirosis may be considered a possible cause, the freezing and thawing of the tissues made them unsuitable for further study.

Dietrich¹ has described medial arterial calcification in two beavers with interstitial nephritis. He suggested a possible disturbance in the calcium-phosphorus balance, a result of disturbed kidney function, as a possible cause. This might be a valid explanation for the arterial lesions in this badger.

Sargent³ has recently described medial arterial calcification in a free-living hare, associated with suppurative metritis and adrenal hypertrophy.

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