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# THE HISTOPATHOLOGY AND PREVALENCE OF Henneguya sebasta AND Kudoa clupeidae IN THE ROCKFISH, Sebastes paucispinis OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Abstract: The pathogenesis of two histozoic myxosporidans, Henneguya sebasta and Kudoa clupeidae, was studied from the Pacific rockfish, Sebastes paucispinis. Infection of the bulbus and truncus arteriosus with H. sebasta was observed in 30 of 100 fish. The parasite metastasized throughout the tissue causing necrosis, hyperplasia and hypertrophy of the connective tissue and smooth muscle. K. clupeidae, found in 37 of 100 fish, caused necrosis and atrophy of host skeletal muscle. The unattractive appearance of Kudoa cysts in rockfish filets detracted from their commercial value.

# INTRODUCTION

Tissue-invading myxosporidans are some of the most destructive and injurious protozoans found in fresh water and marine fishes.8 Two histozoic forms. Henneguya sebasta and Kudoa clupeidae, are common in California rockfishes.<sup>4,5</sup> H. sebasta is found in the bulbus and truncus arteriosus, while K. clupeidae localizes in skeletal muscle. The histozoic habit of these parasites suggests pathogenicity, but to date precise histologic and physiologic evidence of disease are limited. Recently, Meyers et al.<sup>3</sup> described the effect of Henneguya sp. on the bulbus and truncus arteriosus of the bluefish, Pomatomus saltatrix. Rogers and Gaines<sup>7</sup> summarized known research on the lesions caused by protozoan parasites in fish. K. clupeidae and H. sebasta were not included in the review. Recently the histopathology and histogenesis of a related myxosporidan, Henneguya exilis was described in catfish.<sup>1,2</sup> This paper describes the histozoic nature and prevalence of the two myxosporidans in the rockfish, Sebastes paucispinis, and emphasizes the histopathology of the infection.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

One hundred fish obtained from commercial and sport fishermen were fileted and the muscles were examined for protozoan cysts. The heart and aorta were examined for abnormalities. Infected tissue was processed by standard histological techniques, cut in serial sections 3 to 5  $\mu$ m thick, and stained with Mallory's triple trichrome stain and hemotoxylin and eosin. *Kudoa* and *Henneguya* spores isolated from the tissues were stained with Grams and Giemsa's stains, respectively.

#### RESULTS

#### Henneguya sebasta

Fish infected with *H. sebasta* had gross enlargements on the bulbus and truncus arteriosus (Fig. 1). Tissue sections of these enlargements showed a marked hypertrophy with numerous spores present in the infected areas. The parasite appeared to have the ability to metastasize throughout the three tissue layers of the bulbus or truncus arteriosus.

Smooth muscle frequently shows necrosis, pyknosis, and some hyper-



FIGURE 1. *Henneguya sebasta*, macroscopic observation of an infected bulbus and truncus arteriosus with gross enlargement and mass of parasites (arrow).

plasia and hypertrophy (Fig. 2). Proliferation of connective tissue is evident near the parasite, but no fibrous encapsulation of the myxosporidan by the host was observed. Of 100 rockfish examined, 30 were positive for the parasite. Larger rockfish, over 60 cm long, had a higher prevalence of the disease (10 of 20 fish).

#### Kudoa clupeidae

Cysts of *Kudoa clupeidae* in the rockfish usually are elongated, oval structures measuring 7 to 22 mm by 1 to 5 mm in diameter (Fig. 3). They are most frequently situated in the skeletal muscle, either horizontal or diagonal to the integument. Occasionally, deep intermuscular cysts were observed. Of 100

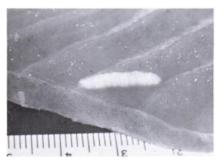


FIGURE 3. *Kudoa clupeidae*, cyst in muscle filet.

rockfish examined, 37 were infected with Kudoa. Ruptured cysts were filled with a thick, creamy substance. Contents of the cysts, however, are primarily Kudoa spores. The developmental sequence of cyst formation, determined by the serial sections, begins with the atrophy and necrosis of the endomysium surrounding individual muscle fibers. This is followed by intramyofibril invasion by the parasite, resulting in necrosis (Fig. 4). Asexual division increases the number of myxosporidans in the infected area and the cyst becomes encapsulated (Fig. 5). The later phase is characterized by tissue necrosis, severe atrophy (Fig. 5), some hypertrophy and presence of pyknotic nuclei. There was no evidence of chronic inflammation within the infected tissue. The host eventually isolates the spores

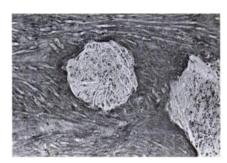


FIGURE 2. *Henneguya sebasta*, destruction of smooth muscle due to myxosporidan with no cyst encapsulation.

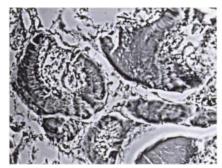


FIGURE 4. Kudoa clupeidae, marked necrosis of skeletal muscle.

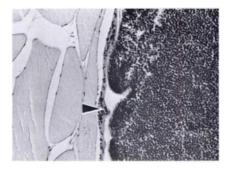


FIGURE 5. Kudoa clupeidae, encapsulated cyst. Note capsule wall (arrow).

within a connective tissue capsule of collagenous fibers and fibroblasts (Fig. 5).

#### DISCUSSION

One of the more remarkable characteristics of *H. sebasta* is its ability to metastasize throughout the tunica adventitia and tunica interna layers of the bulbus and truncus arteriosus near the heart. *H. sebasta* apparently has the ability to destroy smooth muscle (Fig. 2) and connective tissue of the bulbus and truncus arteriosus. At no time does the host encapsulate the parasite. *Henneguya* probably lyses these tissues, which might weaken and eventually rup-

Acknowledgements

vious in older fish, the host quite possibly survives the infection. Cysts of K. clupeidae in rockfish filets

ture the aorta and adjoining vessels. Since the disease seems to be more ob-

are quite obvious to the average sportsman and fish market customer. Pus exuding from the ruptured cyst is unappetizing and, thus, heavily infected fish usually are discarded. To cope with customer complaints, the owner of a Southern California fish market coined the term "flavor buds" to describe these unappealing objects.

Myxosporidian parasites reportedly cause mushiness, milkiness or a softening of the flesh in many species of fishes.<sup>8</sup> Patashnik and Groninger<sup>6</sup> reported proteolytic enzyme activity of *Kudoa* sp. from several Pacific fishes. The proteolytic activity of *K. clupeidae* apparently is responsible for the extensive necrosis of the muscle fibers in *S. paucispinis*. Nevertheless, liquefication of refrigerated rockfish filets is not common in Southern California.

Complete encapsulation of Kudoa suggests that the spores are released upon the death of the host. A question suggesting further research is whether commercial and sport fishermen are significantly perpetuating the life cycle of K. clupeidae by disposing spent rockfish carcasses in the ocean.

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