

Fascioliasis in Working Mules in Endemic Andean Areas of Mendoza Province, Argentina

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Resumen

Fascioliasis, the affection caused by *Fasciola* sp. is an important livestock disease and major threat to human health (in Latin America only *F. hepatica* is present). Although fascioliasis is widely studied in several domestic species, in Argentina, the affection in equines, and particularly mules, is not even considered, thus not studied. Argentina has a quite remarkable tradition regarding mules, since they took part in every major event along the country history: from an intense commerce during colonialism with several neighbouring countries, crossing the Andes with the Ejército Libertador to fight against realists and liberate southern America from the Spanish oppression, to every transcendental conflict in the political conformation of such a wide and diverse nation. In Argentinean Andean regions, mules are considered the working animal by excellence. The greatest mule market ever was located in northern Argentina during XVI th century, exporting hundreds of thousands of them to Bolivia and Perú. Since those moments, mules are used in every activity in the Andes highlands.

160 working mules from Parque Provincial

Aconcagua and from the Ejército Argentino regiments, located in Uspallata, were coprologically examined for parasites eggs, using both flotation and sedimentation techniques. Coprological examination revealed 64.4% strongyle and 19.4% (31) *Fasciola* infection prevalence. 61.3% of the mules with *Fasciola* also showed strongyle infection. The eggs per gram of faeces were 1-4 epg for *Fasciola*, and 1-270 epg for strongyle.

This study reveals that mules are infected not only with common equine parasites, but also with not expected *Fasciola hepatica*. Although this is a first approach to the problem, the question arises around the epidemiological role that mules may play in the transmission of *F. hepatica* to other susceptible animals and humans, particularly taking into account the transport of animals to working areas and the great distances they travel while being used.

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