



Rift Valley fever? Investigation of a suspect case

In early January a private veterinarian contacted State Vet: Worcester with a suspicion of Rift Valley fever (RVF) in a sheep flock outside Montagu. The area experienced heavy rains and flooding in 2023 and the flock was not vaccinated against RVF.

Two sheep showed suspect clinical signs. The first appeared lethargic three weeks prior and had a fever. The farmer had treated it with sulfonamides and probiotics. The second was a four-year-old pregnant Dormer ewe that aborted and had a fever. She was observed to be lethargic, walking aimlessly in an uncoordinated manner and lost weight, but had a swollen abdomen. She died after five days of illness. On post mortem, the spleen and liver appeared significantly enlarged and the liver was brittle. The private vet took organ samples in formalin.

The local animal health technician followed up by taking serum samples from 10 sheep in the flock, all of which tested ELISA positive for RVF IgG and one of the samples also tested IgM positive. The RVF ELISA is not a highly specific test, and another test was needed to confirm the diagnosis. Unfortunately, there were no fresh organ samples available to do a PCR test.

Subsequent histopathology of formalinised organ samples from the dead ewe revealed numerous neoplastic cells in the liver, spleen and associated blood vessels, compressing the normal cells and causing hepatic lipidosis and bile stasis. A diagnosis of suspected lymphoid leukemia or leukemic lymphoma was made.

No further deaths or abortions were reported on the farm and the lambs that were born appeared healthy.

Outbreak events

A **bat-eared fox** was seen close to **Elands Bay** wandering aimlessly. It was reported to Cape Nature, who contacted the State Vet's office and then shot the fox and delivered the carcass for sample collection. Samples taken of the fox's brain tested positive for **rabies**. A rabies vaccination campaign for all dogs and cats in the area was planned.

Wool disturbances were seen in a flock of sheep on a farm near **Mossel Bay**. *Psoroptes ovis* mites were seen on microscopic examination of a wool sample, confirming a **sheep scab** infestation. A second infestation was found on another farm in the same area when contact farms were inspected. Both farms were placed under quarantine and the sheep treated twice under official supervision.

Salmonella Enteritidis was cultured from routine swabs taken on five different broiler **chicken** farms in the **Cape Town, Malmesbury** and **Worcester** areas.

A farmer near **Kliprand** reported that one of his **goats** had died after showing neurological signs. Another nanny goat was affected with similar clinical signs, appearing lame and with her head pulled back over her shoulder (Fig. 1). **Tetanus** was suspected and the farmer advised to treat the affected goat with antibiotics and vaccinate the rest of the herd.

A routine inspection of **sheep** near **Bot River** found them to be infested with **red lice**. A skin scrape sample was taken and sheep scab excluded.



Figure 1: A goat showing clinical signs of tetanus, including lameness and retrocollis (Photo: J. Kotzé)

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