Parasitic zoonoses in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

Relatively few species of zoonotic parasites have been recorded in humans in Papua New Guinea. A greater number of potentially zoonotic species, mostly nematodes, occur in animals but are yet to be reported from humans. Protozoa is the best represented group of those infecting man, with *Giardia duodenalis*, *Cryptosporidium parvum*, *Cyclospora cayetanensis*, *Toxoplasma gondii*, *Sarcocystis* spp., *Entamoeba polecki*, *Balantidium coli* and, possibly, *Blastocystis hominis*. The only zoonotic helminths infecting humans include the trematode *Paragonimus westermani*, the cestodes *Hymenolepis nana*, *H. diminuta* and the sparganum larva of *Spirometra erinacea*, and the nematodes *Trichinella papuae* and *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* and, possibly, *Ascaris suum*. Other groups represented are Acanthocephala (*Macracanthorhynchus hirudinaceus*), insects (*Chrysomya bezziana*, *Cimex* sp., *Ctenocephalides* spp.), and mites (*Leptotrombidium* spp. and, possibly *Sarcoptes scabiei*, and *Demodex* sp.). One leech (*Phytobdella lineata*) may also be considered as being zoonotic. The paucity of zoonotic parasite species can be attributed to long historical isolation of the island of New Guinea and its people, and the absence until recent times of large placental mammals other than pig and dog. Some zoonotic helminths have entered the country with recent importation of domestic animals, in spite of quarantine regulations, and a few more (two cestodes, one nematode and one tick) are poised to enter from neighbouring countries, given the opportunity. Improvement in water supplies, human hygiene and sanitation would reduce the prevalence of many of these parasites, and thorough cooking of meat would lessen the risk of infection by some others.

Introduction

Zoonosis, as defined by WHO (1979), covers disease and infection that are ‘naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and man’. While zoonosis is probably as old as man himself, there is no doubt that the domestication of animals, by bringing man and beast into closer contact than had previously occurred, facilitated the process of zoonosis and may have given opportunities for new zoonoses to evolve.

Southwood (1987) states that the largest number of shared diseases are those common to man and dog, the smallest number to man and poultry. He remarks that ‘the number of shared parasites seems proportional to the length of time since domestication’ – amongst mammals, the dog having the longest time history of domestication and the horse the shortest, c. 15,000 and c. 6000 years respectively, according to Clutton-Brock (1999).

The zoonotic parasites present in Papua New Guinea (PNG) when European exploration first began late in the 19th century, are likely to have been here a long time. Two or more waves of human immigrants are believed to have entered the island of New Guinea (NG)†, the first possibly

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†The island of New Guinea is divided into two political entities, PNG, an independent state, in the eastern half and West Papua, a province of Indonesia, in the western half.
50,000 years ago and the last about 5000 years ago (Bulmer, 1982; Main et al., 2001).

Following the last wave of migrants, NG appears to have been in a virtual state of quarantine up to the 19th century as, for several reasons, there was little or no contact with the outside world over this long period. The land link between southern NG and northern Australia, which had been there for millennia, disappeared 6000–8000 years ago when melting glacial ice caused sea levels to rise. NG became an island, situated beyond the world known to ancient civilizations and therefore isolated from their activities.

Later, during the second half of the last millennium, when European countries sent ships to explore, what were for them, unknown parts of the world, the inhospitable nature of the land of NG, as seen from ships, together with the belligerent and less than welcoming attitudes of the people to intruders, discouraged early European exploration. Thus, for thousands of years, the likely contact the people of NG had with the outside world was restricted to shipwrecked seamen and, for coastal people of the western end of the island, some trading with people of the Indonesian islands to the west.

This long isolation meant that there was little opportunity for new zoonotic parasites to enter. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the only zoonotic helminth parasites found in humans when the first parasite surveys were done in the 20th century, were two tapeworms whose natural hosts are rats. Rats and bats were the only placental land mammals present in NG when man first arrived (Flannery, 1995). The parasites of the other mammals on the island, monotremes and marsupials, apparently, find man an unsuitable host. Humans probably acquired no new zoonotic parasites after arrival until domestic animals were brought in; pigs probably about 5000 years ago, and dogs 2000–3000 years ago, while all other domestic livestock arrived within the last 100 or so years. In spite of quarantine regulations, some zoonotic parasites have entered PNG with imported livestock but it remains a country with a restricted range of zoonotic parasites (Barnish & Ashford, 1989).

The zoonotic parasites recorded in PNG can be placed into one of two categories; those found infecting humans, and those present in PNG animals but not yet recovered from humans. In a separate category are zoonotic parasites that occur in neighbouring countries and with the focus in this account is on parasites with zoonotic transmission.

**Protozoa**

Ashford & Atkinson (1992) comment on the abundance of intestinal protozoan fauna found in humans in PNG. Some, such as Dientamoeba fragilis, Entamoeba hartmanni, E. dispers and the pathogenic E. histolytica are known only from man or other primates. Transmission in these species is person to person (anthroponotic) and not zoonotic. The focus in this account is on parasites with zoonotic transmission.

**Potentially zoonotic commensal protozoa**

A variety of protozoa inhabit the human gut in PNG that are, strictly speaking, not parasites but commensals as they are considered to do no harm to the host. They (or identical forms) can be found infecting certain other mammalian hosts; Entamoeba coli, Isodanamoa pluschii, Chilomastix mesnilli have been recorded in pigs, and Endolimax nana, Enteromonas hominis and Pentatrichomonas (= Trichomonas) hominis occur in rodents. These organisms are commonly recorded in human surveys, sometimes with high incidence (Kelly & Gar Avusi, 1974; Kelly, 1975; Desowitz & Barnish, 1986; Ashford & Atkinson, 1992), which prompts the question if their prevalence is associated with zoonotic as well as the normal person to person transmission. The ubiquitous pig, and also rodents, are an integral part of most village environments in PNG.

**Giardia**

*Giardia duodenale* is common in dogs and cats (Thompson, 1998) but there are no records of infection in these or other animals in PNG.

Human infection has been recorded in several surveys in the country (Avery, 1946; Bearup & Lawrence, 1950; Kelly & Gar Avusi, 1974; Hornabrook et al., 1975; Kelly, 1975; Desowitz & Barnish, 1986; Ashford & Atkinson, 1992). Young children were the most frequently infected and usually had the highest infection rate. Crouch (1982) noted that the importance of *Giardia* as a causative agent in diarrhoea in PNG has not been assessed.

Bukenya (1991) recorded a higher prevalence in non-diarrhoeic than in diarrhoeic infants in a PNG coastal settlement survey.

**Cryptosporidium**

The only published report of human infection with *Cryptosporidium parvum* is in a group of children in Goroka (Groves et al., 1994) with an infection rate of 24%, while Barnish (1992) also mentions its diagnosis in patients in Goroka. Ashford & Atkinson (1992) did not detect oocysts in a survey in nearby Asaro valley but, from observations, considered the parasite to occur in the area. It is probably a common but overlooked parasite in the country, although Bukenya (1991) found a maximum prevalence of only 2.1% in diarrhoeic infants under 5 years of age in a survey of a Port Moresby coastal settlement.

As there are no reports of infection in PNG animals, the epidemiological role animals may have in PNG has not been investigated.

**Cyclospora**

Ashford (1979) reported an unidentified coccidian parasite of man in PNG, later named *Cyclospora cayetanensis* when discovered in a population of children in Peru (Ortega et al., 1994). It has been recorded elsewhere in non-human primates (Ashford et al., 1993; Smith et al., 1996) as well as in chickens, rodents and dogs (Scherchand & Cross, 2001). It is not known if animals are infected in PNG.

**Toxoplasma**

The domestic cat, being the sole member of the cat family in NG, is the only definitive host of
Toxoplasma gondii. Cats, and presumably T. gondii, first arrived on the island probably early in the colonial period but there are no reports of any being examined for infection, and there are very few records of other animals acting as intermediate hosts. De Roever-Bonnet et al. (1964) reported 64% infection in pigs and 6 and 7% respectively in dogs and cattle in West Papua. These data, however, may not be typical of NG animals as the pigs and cattle were periurban and the dogs were European owned. In PNG, Ewers (1973) recorded Toxoplasma sp. in a pigeon (Ducula concinna).

Reports of human infection are more numerous. De Roever-Bonnet et al. (1964), Cross et al. (1977) and Wallace et al. (1974) reported varying prevalence rates in various communities on the island of New Guinea, which the latter authors attribute to the presence or absence of cats in the environment. Zigas (1976), on the other hand, considered there were strong indications linking infection amongst four communities in East New Britain Province, PNG, to factors other than the presence of cats, such as consumption of undercooked infected meat.

Sera collected recently from five rural villages in Western Province had prevalence rates of more than 85% in men and 72% in women (unpublished data). A few cats are present in the villages, but the very high prevalence suggests that they are not the sole source of infection. Serological evidence of toxoplasmosis in some species of deer has been recorded overseas (Watson & Charleston, 1985), and 2% prevalence has been reported in agile wallabies (Macropus agilis) in northern Australia (Speare et al., 1983) and severe outbreaks have occurred in captive wallabies in New Zealand (Duignan et al., 2004). As rusa deer (Cervus timorensis), agile wallabies and wild pigs form a regular part of the diet of the village people in the area, undercooked meat could be a major source of infection. Screening of a group of high school students and teachers from a school near Port Moresby on the other hand, showed a seroprevalence of 18% (unpublished data). This is the same rate of infection that Klufio et al. (1993) found in pregnant women attending antenatal clinic in Port Moresby General Hospital. One can speculate that the village and urban groups have different sources of infection, linked to different eating habits, although Dubey (1998a) notes that it is very difficult to determine a source of infection.

<table>
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<td>Trematodes</td>
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Note: ? denotes uncertainty as to a parasite’s continued presence in PNG; and * indicates uncertainty as to a parasite’s zoonotic status.

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Clinical toxoplasmosis, as distinct from detection of Toxoplasma by serodiagnosis, has been recorded in NG only by De Roever-Bonnet et al. (1964) who reported a
case of congenital infection of a stillborn child and a case of an adult with ocular anomalies, probably produced by toxoplasmosis, both in West Papua.

Sarcocystis

Man acts as the definitive host for two zoonotic species, Sarcocystis hominis and S. suihominis and can be an accidental (dead-end) intermediate host for several unidentified species of sarcocysts that infect livestock and wild animals (Dubey, 1998b).

Munday et al. (1977) reported 45% of free-range chickens tested in PNG had sarcocysts in their muscles; dogs were considered to be the definitive hosts. Examination of pig tissues from various parts of PNG (mostly commercially grown pigs) at the National Veterinary Laboratory over 11 years, found only 1.4% to be infected and an infection rate of 0.5% was recorded in cattle tissues over the same period (unpublished data). Barnish & Ashford (1989), on the other hand, state that village pigs in PNG are commonly infected with Sarcocystis sp., and found the scarcity of records of human infection surprising in view of the importance pig meat has in the traditional diet of many people. It is not known if the sarcocysts seen in tissues of pigs and cattle are zoonotic species, or cysts of other species that can occur in pigs and cattle for which the dog and/or cat act as definitive hosts (Dubey, 1998b).

Blastocystis

Ashford & Atkinson, (1992) found Blastocystis hominis to be the most abundant gut parasite of people in the Asaro valley in the highlands of PNG, while Bangs et al. (1996) report infection as infrequent to rare in people of the Oksibil valley in the highlands of West Papua. It is not known if Blastocystis is present in animals in PNG, therefore, it remains to be discovered what role, if any, animals have in its epidemiology.

Entamoeba

There are sporadic reports in some countries of human infection with the unicellular cyst-producing Entamoeba polecki (which Verweij et al. (2001) suggest should be referred to as ‘E. polecki-like’ pending clarification of genetic variation), but no infection occurs in SE Asia and in PNG (Lloyd, 1998a). McMillan & Kelly (1970) reported that Heydon was the first to record E. polecki in PNG in a 1933 human survey in the highlands. Subsequent surveys, (Vines & Kelly, 1966; Kelly & Gar Avusi, 1974; Kelly, 1975; Desowitz & Barnish, 1986; Ashford & Atkinson, 1982) have shown it is a common intestinal parasite, sometimes being the predominant protozoan species of the gut fauna (Kelly, 1975; Desowitz & Barnish, 1986). Muller et al. (1987) refer to its common occurrence in a highlands survey in West Papua.

In PNG E. polecki occurs usually as one of many intestinal species of protozoa, including the pathogenic E. histolytica with which it may be confused as both the trophozoite and cyst stages of the two species are very similar (Martinez-Palomo & Espinosa Cantellano, 1998). Consequently, although infection with E. polecki is generally considered to be asymptomatic in humans, if it generates any ill-effects, they may be masked by, or attributed to, those produced by E. histolytica.

There is no information about the prevalence of E. polecki in pigs in PNG but it is likely to be widespread as human infection elsewhere is often found where there is close association between humans and pigs, as occurs in many societies in the country.

Balantidium

Human infection with Balantidium coli is uncommon while infection in pigs is said to be extremely common (Zaman, 1998). Various surveys conducted in PNG indicate that human infection with B. coli can be common in one locality but rare or absent from another a short distance away (Couvé & Rijpstra, 1961). These authors, working in the highlands of West Papua, postulate that high prevalence may be linked to a high population of pigs and their need in a cold, high altitude environment for warmth and shelter which they find under or within their owner’s house, ensuring close contact between pigs and people and conducive for the possibility of zoonotic infection to occur.

The highest prevalences of human infection reported in PNG are 28% (Couvé & Rijpstra, 1961) and 20% (Van der Hoeven & Rijpstra, 1957) in highland communities in West Papua. Heydon, as quoted by Ewers & Jeffrey (1971), recorded the highest prevalence found in PNG of 11% in people in the Mt Hagen area in 1933. More than 30 years later, Vines & Kelly (1966) reported an infection rate of only 1.7% in the highland provinces, and Kelly (1975) found infection in only three villages of more than 60 surveyed in eight provinces.

Reports of clinical cases of balantidiasis in PNG are rare; Radford (1973) described four, and one fatal case is mentioned by Barnish & Ashford (1989). There are very few published accounts of infection of pigs with Balantidium in NG, but there is a general perception that infection is common in village pigs, especially in mountainous localities. Van der Hoeven & Rijpstra (1957) and Couvé & Rijpstra (1961) found infection in every village pig tested in one highland valley in West Papua, while infection was much less prevalent in coastal village pigs (Van der Hoeven & Rijpstra, 1962). Although no surveys of village pigs for B. coli have been done in PNG, isolated testing indicates a general presence especially in the highlands. Unpublished data show that infection can occur also in commercial piggeries both in the highlands and lowlands. There is a potential risk of infection, therefore, not only for villagers but also for staff of piggeries and abattoirs.

Trematodes

It would appear there were no trematodes infecting man in PNG before recent immigrants and their animals began arriving in late 19th century. The situation today is only slightly different, with one fluke (Fasciola hepatica) definitely and one (Paragonimus westermani) possibly established in the country.

Although a number of other trematodes have been suggested to be present in PNG, the evidence is not
compelling as it is based on isolated findings of one or more eggs in human faeces. Positive identification of helmhnt eggs in faeces can be difficult as some worms belonging to different genera, and even classes, produce eggs of similar appearance and size. The difficulties are greater when determination is dependent on recognition of eggs in histological sections, as Prociv (1989) points out, with reference to a claim by Murthy et al. (1989) of possible schistosomiasis in a man from Enga Province, based on seeing eggs in sections of liver. Both Prociv (1989) and Walker (1989) consider this case was probably one of misidentification.

Blackburn & Ma (1971) obtained positive reactions with intradermal tests of Schistosoma mansoni antigen in people of the Baiyer River area, Western Highlands Province, but the authors themselves acknowledge it could be a case of cross-reaction with other helminths as there is no clinical or laboratory evidence of human schistosomiasis in PNG. Papua New Guinea, therefore, remains a country in which diseases caused by flukes are not a problem for human health but there is need for constant vigilance as, with the ever increasing movement of people, the risk of one or more of the many species of trematodes endemic in the S.E. Asian region entering the country is greater than ever. The molluscan fauna of the country is largely unknown as, consequently, is the role they could play as intermediate hosts of exotic trematodes.

Fasciola

The first known arrival of Fasciola hepatica in PNG was in the immediate years after World War II. Sheep from Australia were placed at Nondugl, Western Highlands Province, a site where the aquatic snail Lymnaea viridis occurs. Lymnaea viridis is the only intermediate host in PNG and is present above 550–650 m in some but not all river systems. Fasciola is now a common parasite of sheep and cattle in Eastern Highland Province, with foci of infection in ruminants in some highland sites of other mainland provinces. Human fascioliasis due to F. hepatica is said to be uncommon (Macpherson et al., 2000).

Watercress (Nasturtium officinale) is the plant most commonly reported as the source of human infection in many countries where it is eaten as a fresh salad vegetable. Watercress is an introduced plant in PNG and people prefer eating it as a cooked vegetable. The heating process kills any larvae present, which may explain why no human infection has been reported as yet in PNG. Nevertheless, with the high prevalence of infection in sheep and cattle in parts of the highlands, and the common human habit of chewing on blades of grass, it would be surprising if there has been no zoonotic transmission in the country.

A seasonality of infection is usually seen in animals in PNG, coinciding with or following a wet period when flooding of pasture allows snails to migrate from permanent water courses and contaminate surrounding vegetation with larvae. Low level infection can occur throughout the year where there are seepages or conditions are permanently swampy (Owen, 1989).

Paragonimus

The only case of paragonimiasis recorded in PNG is by Cilento & Backhouse (1927) who found a pair of adult Paragonimus westermani at post mortem in the lungs of a man from coastal East New Britain Province. The infected person came from a village that had had practically no contact with overseas people and where crabs (potential second intermediate hosts) were a very popular item of food. Taking these facts into consideration, the authors felt the disease was endemic in the locality. The lack of reported sighting of Paragonimus in people from the area in subsequent years suggests it has failed to survive or is maintaining itself at a low prevalence with human incidence too low to elicit pathognomonic symptoms. According to Barnish & Ashford (1989), Anon. (1927) refers to Paragonimus being occasionally seen in Chinese in the country. It is not known which snail in PNG can serve as the intermediate host.

There are no records of dogs, cats or rats, the other potential definitive hosts of P. westermani, being infected in the locality.

Cestodes

Although PNG has a number of zoonotic tapeworms, none pose a serious threat to human health. However, two other cestodes (Taenia solium and Echinococcus granulosus) present in neighbouring countries, would lead to serious consequences for human health if they became established in the country.

Hymenolepis

From data recorded in various surveys, Hymenolepis nana is a rare parasite of humans in PNG. It was not seen, for example, by Bearup & Lawrence (1950), McMillan et al. (1971), Kelly (1975) and Hornabrook et al. (1975), while Shield et al. (1980, 1981, 1984) reported infection of only one person in each of the three surveys. The only record of rodent infection in PNG is of a massive infection of a mouse belonging to the National Veterinary Laboratory mouse colony (unpublished data), which suggests it can be locally common.

While H. nana is the most frequently encountered human tapeworm in the world (Lloyd, 1998b) but uncommon in PNG, H. diminuta is a much more common parasite of man in the country although it is a relatively rare human parasite elsewhere (Bisseru, 1967). Hymenolepis diminuta has been reported in the highlands, mostly from children, by Vines & Kelly (1966), McMillan et al. (1971), and Kelly (1975), with infection percentages up to 3%. There are no records, it seems, of the worm occurring in people living at low altitudes. The reason cannot be linked to adverse effect of higher environmental temperatures as H. diminuta eggs have greater heat tolerance than that of its beetle intermediate host (Pappas et al., 1999) and H. diminuta has been identified from various species of rats at lowland sites in Central, Western and East Sepik provinces as well as from Goroka in the highlands.

Dipylidium

Dipylidium caninum is a very common tapeworm of dogs in PNG, particularly in urban centres (Hamir &
Wild, to become sanitary cleaners and thereby becoming faeces to food as well as allowing pigs, both village and almost all in young children. There are no reports of human infection in PNG.

**Spirometra (sparganum)**

Adult *Spirometra erinacei* tapeworms have been found on several occasions in urban dogs and cats in Port Moresby, Lae and Goroka. Its prevalence in rural animals is not known.

The only recorded case of human sparganosis in PNG is of a young man with the larval sparganum worm contained in a nodule in an orbit (Ashford et al., 1978). Instances of sparganosis in animals have been recorded in reptiles only in PNG, found either between muscles or in the serous membranes of the body cavity. The crocodile is the most commonly infected animal and infection has been seen also in one species of goanna and two species of snakes. In Australia, wild pigs can be infected (Stevenson & Hughes, 1988) as well as species of bandicoot, dunnart and echidna (Spratt et al., 1991), animals that also occur in PNG. Echidnas are said to be affected more severely than other secondary intermediate hosts (Booth, 1994); they are greatly prized by hunters in PNG (Flannery, 1995).

**Taenia**

The tapeworms *Taenia taeniaeformis* and *T. hydatigena* have, on rare occasions, been found infecting man, and both have been recorded in animals in PNG (Egerton & Rothwell, 1964; Talbot, 1968/69). Adult *T. taeniaeformis* has been recorded a few times in cats and the larval stage recovered from the liver of the large rat (*Mallomys rotundus*) on three occasions (unpublished data). Adult *T. hydatigena* tapeworm has been recorded in dogs but is not common. The larval bladder stage has been recovered from sheep, almost solely from imports that have been quarantined and echidna (Spratt et al., 1991), animals that also occur in PNG. Echidnas are said to be affected more severely than other secondary intermediate hosts (Booth, 1994); they are greatly prized by hunters in PNG (Flannery, 1995).

**Echinococcus (hydatid)**

Papua New Guinea is one of the few countries in the world free of hydatid disease. The application of strict quarantine regulations with respect to importation of dogs has prevented the entry of the adult worm of *Echinococcus granulosus* into the country, although Alto & Nettleton (1989) cite the presence of cysts in two cattle thought to have been born in PNG, as indicating illegal entry of infected dogs had occurred. An extensive programme of purging dogs in the locality yielded no tapeworms and there has been no evidence in subsequent years that *E. granulosus* is cycling in PNG, but the risk of entry is always present.

Finding hydatid cysts in imported sheep and cattle in PNG is not surprising as the disease is present in parts of Australia and New Zealand, the only countries from which these animals are sourced. About 90% of cysts in cattle are sterile, but more than 90% are fertile in sheep (Stevenson & Hughes, 1988), which is the main reason why all sheep imported into PNG are kept in life-long quarantine. Maintenance of strict import and quarantine regulations and vigilance of meat inspection at abattoirs should continue, to prevent this zoonotic parasite from becoming established in PNG.

**Nematodes**

The number of nematode worms in PNG that are zoonotic or potentially zoonotic is relatively high and, with the occasional discovery of new or exotic species, the list is growing.
Ascaris

Both Ascaris lumbricoides and A. suum, parasites of man and pig respectively, are very common in parts of PNG. The issue of whether or not A. suum has a zoonotic role in this and other countries remains unresolved.

Ancylostoma

The four species of zoonotic hookworms belonging to the genus Ancylostoma that can cause health problems for humans are A. caninum (of dogs), A. tubaeforme (of cats) and A. braziliense and A. caninum (of dogs and cats). Each species causes distinct clinical problems in humans, affecting the skin, intestine or blood (Prociv, 1998). All can enter the body via the mouth or the skin but not all produce cutaneous lesions (larva migrans) or attain adulthood in the human gut.

Strongyloides

Strongyloides stercoralis has not been recorded in dogs in PNG and is uncommon in Australia, but as the worm is difficult to see grossly in post mortem (it has a length of 2.0 to 2.8 mm), and larvae, not eggs, are passed in the faeces, it may have been overlooked. It is not known, therefore, if dogs have a zoonotic role in infecting humans here. The other human species present, S. fuelleborni kellyi, is known only from man (Ashford & Crewe, 1998); its geographical isolation from S. f. fuelleborni in Africa remains an unexplained mystery (Viney et al., 1991).

Other species of Strongyloides occur in animals in PNG: S. papillosus in cattle and sheep, S. ransoni in pigs and S. westeri in horses. The infective larvae of all these species are able to penetrate human skin but are unable to develop into adult worms (Muller, 2002).

Capillaria

No species of Capillaria has been reported in man in PNG but Bangs et al. (1994) found evidence of indigenous infection of a child with an unidentified species of Capillaria in a remote part of West Papua near the PNG border. The pathogenic C. philippinensis occurs in parts of the Philippines and some SE Asian countries and, therefore, is a potential exotic zoonosis.

A number of different species of Capillaria have been recorded in chickens and pigeons (Egerton & Rothwell, 1964; Talbot, 1968/69) and in ruminants in PNG, and Mackerras (1957) described an unidentified species in the spleen of a rat (Rattus rattus) from Port Moresby. Capillaria papuensis is an endemic species common here in domestic (Copland, 1975) and wild (unpublished data) pigs. It is unlikely that any of these animal species are zoonotic, otherwise eggs would have been detected in the many human surveys carried out in PNG.

Trichuris

Trichuris suis of pigs, which morphologically resembles closely the human whipworm T. trichiura, has a widespread distribution in the country and, together with the less common T. vulpis of dogs, is potentially zoonotic, but neither species has been recorded in man in PNG.

Trichinella

No species of Trichinella was known in NG until, in 1988, a few village pigs and about 8% of wild pigs in the Bensbach area of Western Province, were found to be parasitized (Owen et al., 2000). Pigs in the area had been monitored periodically before for Trichinella but none had been detected. The species discovered in 1988 proved to be new, T. papuae (Pozio et al., 1999), and, because it is non-encapsulated, detection with the compression method used earlier would have been difficult. This means there is no certainty how long T. papuae has been present in Bensbach pigs and we have no knowledge as to where it came from as the situation on the West Papua side of the border is not known. Recently, commercially farmed crocodiles, originating from the Kikori area of Gulf
Province, were found to be infected with *T. papuae* (Pozio et al., 2004).

People living in the Bensbach villages were tested and 28.9% were serologically positive for *T. papuae* (Owen et al., 2001), while lower prevalence rates were found in some villages further away from the focal area. No one, so far, has been found to be clinically ill from trichinellosis but, as some of the symptoms, such as fever, myalgia, fatigue, eosinophilia, diarrhoea, etc. are non-specific, it is difficult to know to what extent infection affects the well-being of people.

People become infected by eating uncooked or undercooked infected pig meat. Infection rate amongst the Bensbach people is higher in men than in women and this is attributed to the male custom of eating tidbits of raw or undercooked pig meat when out hunting. The general source of infection for people is linked to the method of cooking meat in a *mumu* (earth oven). The area does not have normal river stones, used for *mumu* elsewhere in PNG, and people make use of substitute materials, such as small rough stones, pieces of termite mounds, balls of dried clay and, when available, pieces of metal. These do not retain heat adequately to thoroughly cook all meat so that infection may follow. There is still much to learn about this new zoonosis in PNG.

*Gnathostoma*

Miyazaki (1968) reported that the species of *Gnathostoma* found in PNG pigs was *G. doloresi* and not *G. hispidum as previously believed. *Gnathostoma doloresi* is one of several species of the genus that can cause both cutaneous and visceral larva migrans in humans. It has widespread distribution in village pigs in PNG as well as in wild pigs. Talbot (1972) recorded a prevalence of 55% in a survey of village pigs. As yet, there are no cases of human gnathosomiasis reported in PNG but, with the increase in foreign travel and an inclination to try ethnic food, infection may be acquired by travellers while overseas.

*Spirocerca lutea* and *Cheilospirura hamulosa* are two nematodes that on rare occasions have infected humans; they are common parasites of their natural hosts in PNG.

No human case involving *Spirocerca lutea* has been reported in PNG but, as Hamir & Wernery (1987) recorded 70% prevalence in dogs in Port Moresby, it must be viewed as a potential human parasite in the country. Faust et al. (1970) found it surprising that more cases had not been observed in enzootic areas.

Humphrey (1979) recorded a prevalence of up to 10% *Cheilospirura hamulosa* in free-range and semi-intensively kept chickens in PNG, being somewhat more common in lowland than highland locations. It has been recovered once from a nodule on the conjunctiva of a man in the Philippines (Muller, 2002); there are no human cases recorded in PNG.

*Angiostrongylus (Parastrongylus)*

Scrimgeour (1984) showed that *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* is well established in three species of rats and in the small rough stones, pieces of termite mounds, balls of dried clay and, when available, pieces of metal. These do not retain heat adequately to thoroughly cook all meat so that infection may follow. There is still much to learn about this new zoonosis in PNG.

*Dirofilaria*

*Dirofilaria immitis*, canine heartworm, is a common parasite of dogs in PNG, particularly in urban areas (Hamir & Wernery, 1987) and, occasionally, of cats. Humans are accidental and unsatisfactory hosts in the dog–mosquito–dog cycle. There are no documented reports of human infection in PNG but it may be a mistake to assume that none occurs here as, human populations in other endemic areas have seroprevalences approaching those corresponding to canine populations (Simon Martin & Genchi, 2000).

*Anisakis*

Infective larvae of *Anisakis simplex* have been found in skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) in waters of the southern coast of PNG. They have been recovered here also on several occasions in foreign canned mackerel and, although no longer infective, they may elicit allergic responses in susceptible people (Audicana et al., 2002).

*Eustrongylides*

*Eustrongyloides* larvae of unknown species have been recovered from three species of freshwater fish and from two species of crocodiles in PNG. There are no reports of human infection in the country but there is a potential risk of infection if freshwater fish or crocodile meat are eaten raw or in an inadequately cooked state. The growing international trend of eating uncooked fish and other meat dishes increases the risk of infection.

*Mammomonogamus*

In 2001, *Mammomonogamus larvatus*, previously unknown in PNG, was found in the larynx of a bovine at slaughter (unpublished data); more cases have subsequently been found from the same locality. The source of the worms is not known and there are no reports of human infection.
Parasitic zoonoses in Papua New Guinea

Acanthocephala

Macracanthorhynchus and Moniliformis

Infection of village and wild pigs with Macracanthorhynchus hirudinaceus in PNG is common. It is not surprising that a 3-year-old child was found infected (Barnish & Misch, 1987) as it is the nature of young children to put objects in their mouths and often they indulge in geophagy (Lloyd, 1998d).

Two species of Moniliformis, M. moniliformis and M. dubius, that are sporadic human parasites, are present in rats in PNG. They both use cockroaches or beetles as intermediate hosts. As Miyazaki (1991) remarks, it is impossible to envisage humans directly eating cockroaches but infection may be possible through unwittingly swallowing a larva in the debris of a cockroach. No case of human infection has been reported in PNG.

Hirudinea

Although leeches are not usually considered as zoonotic parasites, in one locality in PNG significant parasitism of man by a land leech, Phisodobella lineata, is linked to heavy infestation of domestic cattle. Leeches, apparently, were no more of a problem in the Pimaga area of Southern Highlands Province than in other humid parts of the country prior to the introduction of cattle by a mission in the 1960s to alleviate local malnutrition. The locality is at an altitude of about 610 m and surrounded by sago swamps.

The arrival of cattle led to a leech population increase that, in years with above average rainfall (>5000 mm), can reach plague levels. Under these conditions, cattle become anaemic, debilitated and, reportedly, sometimes die as a result of leech infestation. There are no reports of human health being directly affected by the leeches but, in the words of a member of the mission staff, they ‘make life untenable for man and beast’. Control measures, other than removal of the cattle, are restricted to temporary remedies such as spraying pasture with concentrated salt solution and topical application of lemon juice, as potentially more effective, long-term remedies involve chemicals that can be hazardous for humans and the environment.

Insects

Chrysomya

Chrysomya bezziana, the Old World screw-worm fly, that can infect any warm-blooded animal, occurs all over PNG except on Buka and Bougainville islands (Spradbery, 1991). Zumpt (1965) refers to two cases of human myiasis infection in New Ireland Province, and Barnish & Richens (1989) describe three cases in the highlands, affecting an eye socket, nose and ear. Animal ‘strikes’, particularly of cattle and sheep, are common.

Three other Chrysomya species widespread in the country, C. megacephala, C. rufifacies and C. suffranca, unlike C. bezziana, are not obligatory parasites but can be involved in myiasis, usually as secondary agents (Kurahashi, 1987; Spradbery, 1991). There are no reports of human infestation in PNG, but myiasis by the first two species has been observed on several occasions in sheep (unpublished data).

Cimex

The bed bug, Cimex lectularius, normally feeds on man but it also can be found associated with laying birds in chicken houses in PNG, which may serve as sources of infestation for humans.

Ctenocephalides and other fleas

The cat flea (Ctenocephalides felis) and the dog flea (C. canis) can transfer to man for short periods, especially when the normal host is not available. This often happens in PNG when a house, which had a cat or dog, stands empty for a period before being reoccupied. Vibrations caused by human movement liberate adult fleas from pupae hidden in cracks leading to attacks by hungry fleas. Pigs housed near human dwellings can be a source of C. felis and, also, of the human flea, Pulex irritans (Beesley, 1974), so that infestation in piggeries may be a problem for workers (Stevenson & Hughes, 1988). Ctenocephalides felis, C. canis and P. irritans serve as intermediate hosts for the tapeworm, Dipylidium caninum.

Traub et al. (1970) record the presence of the flea Xenopsylla cheopis on rats in the Bulolo area, and X. vexabilis on rats in Bulolo and Port Moresby environs. Xenopsylla vexabilis has been found also in Western Province. In the absence of their rat hosts, they will readily infest man. The significance of these fleas is that they, and also P. irritans, are vectors of plague, and X. cheopis transmits murine typhus. Although neither disease exists in PNG, their vectors are of special interest to health authorities.

Acarines

Sarcoptes

Sarcoptes scabiei, the mite that causes the skin condition known locally as ‘kaskas’, is, apparently, less common in man in PNG now than it used to be (Ewers & Jeffrey, 1971), but the mite is a widespread parasite of pigs (Talbot, 1972) and dogs (Hamir & Wernery, 1987). It is uncertain if Sarcoptes of animal origin is zoonotic as Beesley (1998) comments that it seems poorly adapted to live on man.

Dermanyssus and Ornithonyssus

Dermanyssus gallinae, Ornithonyssus bursa of chickens and other hosts, and O. bacoti of rats are all blood-feeding mites and can transfer quite easily to man, although people only become temporarily infested. All three mites are recorded in PNG (Egerton & Rothwell, 1964; Talbot, 1968/69).

Demodex

Demodectic mange is a serious skin disorder in some animals in PNG, especially dogs, cattle and goats. The forms parasitizing animals are believed to only rarely
infest man, while the human *Demodex folliculorum* is probably a common occupant of the human skin and not considered a medical problem (Beesley, 1998).

**Trombiculid mites**

Two species present in PNG, *Leptotrombidium akamushi* and *L. deliense* (Traub et al., 1970), are of particular medical importance as vectors of the scrub typhus organism *Orientia* (syn. *Rickettsia*) *butsumuensis*. The larvae, known as ‘mokkas’ in PNG or chiggers, normally parasitize rodents, insectivores and birds; in man, ankles, groin and around the waist are sites of choice. Scrub typhus foci are associated with areas where forest has been cleared for gardening and then left to secondary growth, an environment in which both rats and mites flourish (Beesley, 1998). A particularly virulent strain of the rickettsia which led to the death of two army personnel on Bat Island, Manus Province, during World War II, was transmitted by *L. deliense* (Philip & Kohls, 1945).

**Ticks**

There are no ticks that normally parasitize man in PNG. Very occasionally a tick of animal origin is reported, for example, *Amblyomma cyprium cyprium* (of pigs) or *Haemaphysalis novaeguineae* (of marsupials and some domestic animals), but they are of no importance to human health. However, *Ixodes holsocolus*, the paralysis tick, that is widespread on a range of hosts in coastal eastern Australia, would be of concern to PNG if it entered the country.

**Prevention and control**

Improvement in sanitation and especially personal hygiene would reduce transmission of many zoonotic parasites as all the intestinal protozoan fauna and many of the gut helminths of man in PNG use the faecal-oral route to enter the host.

Having pigs roaming free in PNG villages acting as scavengers of human waste, as described by Jenkins (1995), may ‘keep the concentration of human faeces low’ but is not the answer to zoonotic parasites. Eggs of some human parasites pass unaltered through the gut of a pig (Jones, 1976), and pigs act as intermediate hosts for others (e.g. *Taenia solium*). Also, some of the pig’s own parasites may be infective to people (e.g. *Ascaris suum*, *Balantidium coli*). Dogs, like pigs, can act as disseminators and environmental contaminants of some human parasites (*Ascaris lumbricoides*, and possibly *Trichuris trichiura* and *Isospora belli*) (Traub et al., 2002), as well as being mechanical transmitters of *Toxoplasma gondii* and intermediate hosts of *Taenia solium*.

A retrospective interview survey (unpublished) indicates that pit toilets are widely, if not universally, present in PNG villages, mostly associated with individual dwellings but sometimes shared or used as a communal facility. In general, it is only in some coastal villages, where use is made of the sea, and in low-lying locations where the water table is high, that pit latrines are not found. Their usefulness in reducing the risk of infection with zoonotic parasites is lessened, however, by improper usage and lack of maintenance.

Improvement in personal hygiene is closely linked with availability of water, specifically, access to running water, as hand-washing is of particular importance. When water has to be carried long distances, as is often the case in villages, frequent washing of hands is likely to be an unacceptable luxury. However, installation of water supply systems in rural communities in PNG, as Jenkins (1995) points out, has not been without its problems, many of them linked to insensitivity on the part of the facilitators to social and cultural factors.

Gorter et al. (1991), in a study of diarrhoea disease in rural Nicaraguan children less than five years of age, found that those from homes located more than 500 m from a water supply had diarrhoeal incidence 34% higher than children from homes with their own water supply. This is likely to be the case whether the infective agent is microbial or protozoan. Curtis & Cairncross (2003) report that by using soap with water for hand-washing, benefits extend not only to reduction in enteric diseases but also to some other infectious diseases.

Water quality in rural communities can be affected by contamination with faecal matter and, other than boiling water, ensuring contamination-free water usually requires a communal effort in controlling pigs and indiscriminate human defaecation. The general custom in PNG of eating cooked rather than raw leaf vegetables reduces the risk of infection from garden plants watered with contaminated water. Care is not always taken in PNG, particularly at feasts, that meat is properly cooked when eaten and this leads to the risk of infection by such food-transmitted parasites as *Taenia solium*, *Trichinella*, *Capillaria*, *Gnathostoma*, *Anisakis*, *Eustrongylides*, *Paragonimus*, *Toxoplasma* and *Sarcocystis*. Cooking, however, may not help those individuals susceptible to *Anisakis* allergens.

Most cysts, eggs and larvae are susceptible to desiccation, so allowing sunlight on to damp ground is a way of reducing survival time of these soil-transmitted stages. Food, such as flour and cereal grains need to be protected from flour beetles and rodents that serve as intermediate and final hosts respectively of *Hymenolepis* spp.

**Conclusions**

The number of what might be called ‘active’ zoonotic parasites in PNG is relatively small in comparison with many other tropical countries, but a significant number of potential zoonotic forms are present that either have not yet succeeded in infecting man, or infection is so low or sporadic that, so far, they have escaped detection.

A further number of zoonotic organisms are on PNG’s doorsteps, and will present considerable danger to health if they enter and become established here. The warm, humid, tropical environment is conducive for the survival of free living stages, although there may be uncertainty in some instances, for example with trematodes, if suitable intermediate hosts are present to perpetuate a life cycle.

With the increasing movement overseas of Papua New Guineans on academic or lengthy training courses, it is not only foreign visitors or workers entering PNG that may bring exotic zoonotic parasites into the country. While adequate sanitation may prevent the establishment
of these parasites in urban centres, conditions in rural settings such as logging camps could be different. It calls for vigilance on the part of health workers in the field and of those in diagnostic laboratories.

While health education is a key factor in combating zoonotic infections, experience in various countries has shown that for successful implementation of control measures, it is necessary, as Hughes (1992) points out, to have formal and informal cooperation between medical and veterinary interests at all levels of government, and with the community.

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