
Avian Pox in the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch in Alaska

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Avian pox, a viral infection most commonly characterized by discrete, warty, proliferative lesions on the legs, feet, eyelids, and at the base of the bill (Karstad 1971), has been reported in at least 25 species of *Fringillidae* (Kirmse 1967, Savage and Dick 1969, Power and Human 1976). I am unaware of any published reports of avian pox in the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*).

A total of 709 Gray-crowned Rosy Finches (*L.t. griseonucha*) were captured, banded, and released at the U.S. Naval Station, Adak Island, Aleutian Islands, Alaska during 5 winters: 1970-71, 1972-73, 1973-74, 1974-75, 1975-76. This race is resident throughout the Aleutian Islands, the western part of the Alaska Peninsula, and the Shumagin and Semidi islands (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959).

Two birds had massive, yellowish, wart-like lesions on the head similar to those illustrated by Savage and Dick (1969) and Power and Human (1976). A male banded on 17 January 1974 appeared normal and had no pox lesions. When recaptured on 11 December 1974, the bird had a massive lesion on the left side of the head, extending from the base of the bill to the posterior margin of the eye. The lesion surrounded the eye but did not cover it completely. A bird of unknown sex, banded on 3 February 1974, had a large lesion on the right side of the head which completely covered the eye, causing blindness. Infections with a pox virus were presumed on the basis of gross pathology. No histological examinations were made.

All birds were captured in funnel traps covered with 38 mm mesh poultry wire. In their attempt to escape, birds occasionally abraded the soft skin at the base of the upper mandible. Pox virus is unable to penetrate unbroken skin but readily invades cuts or abrasions (Herman et al. 1962).

The incidence rate of 0.2 percent is lower than

that reported in other fringillids (Baldwin 1922, Musselman 1928, Power and Human 1976, Talbot 1922). The feet and tarsi are the usual sites of infection in wild passerine birds, while head lesions are relatively uncommon (Karstad 1971). No obvious lesions were noted on the feet and tarsi of any of the rosy finches handled; it is possible that small lesions were overlooked. Only 2 birds had missing toes, a condition often indicative of prior infection (Bergstrom 1952, Musselman 1928).

This constitutes the first known report of pox virus infection in the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and only the second report of avian pox in a wild bird in Alaska (Morgan and Dieterick 1979).

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Mixed feeding flock of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches and Snow Buntings at banding stations.

Photo by Edgar P. Bailey