



# Newsletter

Term: **Summer** | Issue **14** | November 2023

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# CANKER

## - LESSER - KNOWN FACTS AND FINER POINTS

**Canker is possibly the most well-known disease of pigeons. Many articles on this disease are available in books and internet articles including the Medpet.co.za website.**

**Here we are discussing the lesser-known interesting facts on the disease:**

- While breeding birds are incubating their eggs, crop milk is formed towards the end of incubation. This is as a result of a hormone release towards the end of incubation. Trichomonad levels in the crop increase slowly, reaching a peak during the production of crop milk. The higher Trichomonad levels in the crop milk ensure that the infection is passed on to the next generation.

This reinforces the need to treat the breeding birds for Canker before pairing or at the latest, while incubating their eggs.

- When we see a bird with Canker, we see the typical yellow cheesy lesions in the mouth. It is not hard to diagnose in these cases. We have all seen that.
- In veterinary practice we make or confirm a diagnosis by taking a crop scraping or crop flush. At this early stage of the disease the only microscopic changes in liver and often organs described below would hopefully be minor.

**What are the microscopic lesions we do not see (with the naked eye) under these lesions and elsewhere in the body?**

- Under the “cheese” there are microscopic ulcers in the mouth, esophagus and crop. The breaks in the mucosa allow the Trichomonas to enter the blood stream where they are first found to be doing damage to the liver. In the early stages, it causes fatty changes in the liver. If left untreated, necrotic (dead) foci develop. These, in the very severe cases, become larger and more plentiful.
- From the liver, the Trichomonads can spread to the kidneys, pancreas, lung, airsacs, sinuses, ovaries and testicles. The changes at this later stage would lead to death. Fortunately, in the average loft, the Canker would have been treated before these final stages are reached. The final stages and resultant death are more often found in youngsters in the nest.
- A little-known fact about Trichomonas is that it produces toxins.

**What needs to be done in the treatment and control of Canker?**

- **Treatment of the Canker itself :**  
Treat on a regular basis before the changes described above are allowed to develop. Where possible have the birds tested to ensure the treatment has been effective.
- The microscopic breaks in the mucosa/ulcers can lead to possible secondary bacterial infection. **Antibiotics may be needed.** Many fanciers report better response to Canker treatment when anti-canker remedies are given with antibiotics.
- **Liver protectants in the form of Lewerstim** must be used regularly in case liver damage has been caused. This strengthens our recommendation that it must be used once weekly especially in the race season.

**Treatment of resistant cases of Trichomonas.**

**Enough has been written on routine treatment of Canker.**

**Herewith a few suggestions on the treatment of resistant cases:**

- Meditrich or Canker Tonic given on return from race, before they can infect the birds left in the loft with infections picked up in the basket. This is perhaps the best way to keep Canker under control in the loft. In a loft that is generally clean this would be the route it would use to reinfect the loft. A Canker remedy, like Canker Combo, in the first water that the returning birds are offered, could also be used if the owner is reluctant to handle the birds.
- Meditrich or Canker Tonic given 2 to 3 days in a row (3 days best given in off season). In the race season, they would be given Sunday and Monday. This method would only be used if a single dose of Meditrich or Canker Tonic is not effective.
- Ronsec given as directed i.e. Sunday and Tuesday. Second tablet must not be given later than Tuesday.
- Meditrich or Canker Tonic given while Canker Combo is given in the drinking water.

**What we must keep in mind with Canker is that it spreads mainly, but not exclusively, through the drinking water.**

In overcrowded lofts, apart from the other health issues we have, Canker is an added problem. Each drinking bowl would be used by a large number of pigeons resulting in the water being rapidly contaminated by large numbers of Trichomonas.

If more loft space cannot be provided the least one can do is to change the water more frequently. This is not a sure-fire solution but it would help to a certain extent.

**In closing, one of the problems we find with resistant Canker, is in lofts where a fancier, new to the sport, has received pigeons as gifts from fanciers that have very kindly helped them. It appears that many different strains of Canker are introduced into the loft. These different strains appear to have different susceptibility to the various medications used.**

**Trichomonas infection in the loft becomes a chronic problem.**

**We have been involved in a few cases like this.**

**Three days of treatment with Meditrich cleared the problem.**

**After this treatment routine, Canker treatment kept the odd mild infection under control.**

**The paragraph above emphasizes the importance of treating newly acquired birds for Canker before introducing them into the loft.**