

## **A CASE OF MENINGITIS AND ORCHITIS IN A HARE (*LEPUS EUROPAEUS*) DUE TO FRANCISELLA TULARENSIS**

**FABIEN GREGOIRE<sup>1</sup>, MARC WIRTGEN<sup>1</sup>, ROSARIO VOLPE<sup>1</sup>, ADRIEN NAHAYO<sup>1</sup>, JULIEN PATERNOSTRE<sup>1</sup>, JESSICA PIRSON<sup>1</sup>, DOMINIQUE CASSART<sup>2</sup>, NORA MADANI<sup>3</sup>, ANNICK LINDEN<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Surveillance Network of Wildlife Diseases, Dpt. of Infectious Diseases, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium; <sup>2</sup>Dpt. of Morphology and Pathology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium; <sup>3</sup>ANSES, Unité Zoonoses Bactériennes, Maisons Alfort, France; Email : [f.gregoire@ulg.ac.be](mailto:f.gregoire@ulg.ac.be).

The last occurrence of tularaemia in Belgium was in 2003 with two human cases diagnosed by serology; the two patients showed clinical signs of the disease and reported a close contact with a dying hare. In this later, isolation of the bacteria was positive. In September 2012, in southern Belgium (province of Liège), a young male brown hare was found moribund by a hunter and killed by cervical dislocation with bare hands. The animal was transmitted to the Surveillance Network of Wildlife Diseases for necropsy. At post-mortem examination, numerous whitish foci, less than 1 mm of diameter, were recorded bilaterally on the surface of the testis, the epididymis and the deferent duct. The spleen was doubled in volume, with a firm consistence. The animal showed a poor body condition. Various organs were examined by histopathology. Lung and kidney showed congestion. A light subacute multifocal necrotising inflammation was observed in the liver. Major findings were reported in the brain with generalized subacute necrotising meningitis with local congestion, and in testis with several foci of subacute necrotising orchitis at the periphery of the gland in the tunica albuginea. Infection with *F. tularensis* subsp. *holarctica* was confirmed by both bacterial culture and real-time PCR. This is the first report of meningitis due to *F. tularensis* in a brown hare. Moreover this case shows that tularaemia still occurs in Belgium and can be a potential threat for people in contact with wildlife.