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2 **Serosurveillance for Foot-and-Mouth Disease in Mongolian Gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*)**
3 **and Livestock on the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia**

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17 **ABSTRACT:**

18 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is a highly contagious viral disease that affects most ruminant
19 and porcine species. On Mongolia's Eastern Steppe, Mongolian gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*)
20 share range with domestic livestock and there is concern that gazelles may be a reservoir for the
21 FMD virus. During 2005 – 2008, we collected sera from 57 wild Mongolian gazelle calves, 36
22 adult Mongolian gazelles and 555 adult domestic animals sympatric with the Mongolian gazelle,
23 including sheep, goats, Bactrian camels, and cattle. Our goal was to use these data, in light of the
24 history of FMD outbreaks in Mongolia, to answer two questions: 1) in the absence of FMD
25 outbreaks during the study, did FMD seroprevalence in gazelles decline relative to previously
26 reported gazelle seroprevalence estimates from a previous livestock outbreak year (2001); and 2)
27 does seroprevalence in gazelles mirror that of livestock? Overall, 1.9% (95% CI 1.1 - 3.5%, n =
28 555) of the 4 livestock species were seropositive for non-structural proteins of Foot and Mouth
29 Disease virus (FMDV-NS), while 23.2% (95% CI 20.3 - 26.5%, n = 555) had antibodies for
30 structural proteins (i.e., vaccination-derived antibodies). Seven of 57 free-ranging gazelle calves
31 (10.9%, 95% CI 5.4 – 20.9%) were FMDV-NS positive. FMDV neutralization test results
32 showed exposure of 3 (out of 7 positives) gazelle calves to serotype O. Results of FMDV
33 neutralization test in livestock showed that most of the positive animals were exposed to serotype
34 O (1 camel, 9 cattle, and 2 sheep) and a few animals (5 cattle and 2 sheep) were exposed to
35 serotype Asia-1. None of 36 adult gazelles sampled in 2008 were seropositive for exposure to
36 FMD virus, indicating a significant decline ($\chi^2=18.99$; $p < 0.001$; $df=1$) in seroprevalence among
37 gazelles from the same area during a livestock outbreak. The episodic nature of FMD outbreaks
38 on the Eastern Steppe, with evidence of FMD virus exposure in gazelles only during or following
39 concurrent outbreaks in livestock, suggests that FMD may spill over into the gazelle population

40 during livestock outbreaks, and that successful control of FMD on the Eastern Steppe requires a
41 focus on control in livestock populations through vaccination.

42 **Key Words:** Foot and mouth disease, Mongolian gazelle, *Procapra gutturosa*, Mongolia, Eastern
43 Steppe.

44 INTRODUCTION

45 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is a highly contagious acute viral disease that affects most
46 ruminant and porcine species. Given that a full third of the human population of Mongolia
47 depend directly on livestock production for subsistence, and a further quarter indirectly (Zahler et
48 al. 2007), past outbreaks of FMD have caused severe disruptions to Mongolia's pastoral
49 economy. Furthermore, FMD directly threatens the long-term persistence of the Mongolian
50 gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*), a keystone species on the Mongolian Eastern Steppe, directly
51 through morbidity and mortality, and indirectly through certain disease management actions
52 aimed at them (Sokolov and Lushchekina, 1997, Nyamsuren et al., 2006). Mongolian gazelles
53 share range with domestic livestock (sheep, goats, Bactrian camels and cattle) and there is
54 concern that gazelles and other wildlife species may be an effective means for spread of FMD.
55 Consequently, there is a need to understand the potential role of Mongolian gazelles in the spread
56 of FMD on the Eastern Steppe to aid in the design and implementation of disease management
57 programs.

58 The goal of this project was to investigate the potential role of Mongolian gazelle in
59 epizootics of FMD in Eastern Steppe of Mongolia. Specifically, our goal was to use these data,
60 and a review of previous outbreaks in Mongolia, to answer two questions: 1) given FMD had not
61 been reported on the Eastern Steppe for 1 – 4 years previous to this study, did FMD

62 seroprevalence decline relative to previously reported seroprevalence estimates from 2001, a year
63 in which gazelles were sampled during a livestock outbreak?, and 2) does seroprevalence in
64 gazelles mirror that of livestock? We focused on foot-and-mouth disease virus type O (FMDV-
65 O) as the prominent type identified in Mongolia since FMD re-emergence in Mongolia in 2000
66 but other serotypes such as Asia-1, C and A were screened for as well.

67 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

68 Field sampling was conducted in Dornod Province, Mongolia, during 2005- 2008 (48⁰N,
69 114⁰E; see Figure 1). Gazelle and livestock serum samples were collected from 57 wild
70 Mongolian gazelle calves, 36 adult Mongolian gazelles, and 555 adult domestic animals
71 sympatric with the Mongolian gazelle, including 138 sheep (*Ovis aries*), 140 goats (*Capra*
72 *aegagrus hircus*), 139 Bactrian camels (*Camelus bactrianus*), and 138 cattle (*Bos taurus*).

73 Domestic livestock samples were collected in Ehen Hudag of Matad soum from Dornod
74 province (Figure 1) and Mongolian gazelle samples were collected within a 100 km radius
75 (approximately) from Matad soum of Dornod province. Domestic livestock samples were collected
76 every month from March through December in 2005 (excluding the month of October), January
77 through February in 2006, and May through July in 2007. Mongolian gazelle calf samples were
78 collected in June of 2005 and June of 2007 and adult gazelle samples were collected in
79 September of 2008. Collecting samples from wild gazelles is extremely challenging for several
80 reasons, including that adults are fast and notoriously difficult to capture safely. In 2005 and
81 2007 we began by focused on sampling gazelle calves ranging from 30 minutes to 2 days old,
82 while they were hiding in tall grass for protection and not yet able to run. Age of the calves was
83 determined based on evidence of umbilical cord healing, dryness of hair, and agility. Most calves

84 had nursed and it was assumed that they had acquired maternal colostral immunity at the time of
85 capture. Adult gazelles were captured by a team of 17 people using drive nets for live capture and
86 were released in less than an hour.

87 Blood samples were collected using 9 ml vacuum tubes. The amount of collected whole
88 blood (5-15 ml) varied by age and physical condition of the animal. Collected blood samples
89 were kept at ambient temperature for 10 minutes followed by serum harvesting (using 3600 rpm
90 centrifuge for 5-10 minutes). Harvested sera were kept cool or frozen in the field using a mobile
91 freezer and later were transferred to -20 freezer at the veterinary laboratory. In the hottest months
92 (June-July), samples were kept cool during collection and transportation to prevent from
93 agglutination. During the coldest months (November-January), samples were protected from
94 inadvertent freezing during collection and serum preparation.

95 All of the harvested sera from gazelle calves (57), adult gazelles (16 juveniles and 20
96 adults) and domestic animals (555) were first tested at the local immunology laboratory of the
97 Mongolian Institute of Veterinary Medicine to determine the presence of antibodies to FMDV-O
98 using an Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) test (Yondondorj, 2006), additional
99 screening to differentiate exposure of FMDV to non-structural proteins (FMDV-NS) from
100 structural proteins (vaccinated animals) was performed using Cedi Diagnostics FMDV-NS (now
101 acquired by Prionics) test kit (Cedi® Diagnostics, 2003). All samples from gazelle calves, adult
102 gazelles and all FMDV-NS positive livestock samples¹ were sent for confirmation testing to the
103 USDA, Foreign Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Plum Island, USA (USDA-FADDL)
104 for FMDV screening using 3ABC ELISA, Virus infection associated antigen (VIAA) and
105 serotyping against O, Asia-1, A and C serotypes using tissue culture virus neutralization (TC-
106 VN) tests. We considered samples that tested positive at either laboratory by FMDV-NS, 3ABC

107 ELISA with cut-off value $\geq 50\%$ and VIAA with titer of ≥ 32 as being positive. Unfortunately,
108 FMDV serotyping at Plum Island of the gazelle calf samples collected in 2007 was not possible
109 due to insufficient serum quantity.

110 Seroprevalence in adult gazelles from this study were compared to seroprevalence
111 estimates from adult gazelles sampled in 2001 during an outbreak in livestock (Nyamsuren, 2006)
112 using a Chi-Square test of goodness of fit and independence (Preacher, 2001) to see if there was a
113 temporal change in FMD seroprevalence in the gazelle population in the absence of FMDV-O
114 outbreaks of livestock.

115 **RESULTS**

116 Overall, 1.9% (95% CI 1.1 - 3.5%, n = 555) of the 4 livestock species were seropositive
117 for non-structural proteins (FMDV-NS), while 23.2% (95% CI 20.3 - 26.5%, n = 555) had
118 antibodies for structural proteins (likely from vaccination). Seven of 57 free-ranging gazelle
119 calves (10.9%, 95% CI 5.4 – 20.9%) were seropositive for FMDV-NS (Table 1). The presence of
120 FMDV-NS antibodies in the serum of newborn gazelle calves likely indicates the serological
121 status of the mother (Stone et al. 1960; Graves 1963) from a previous outbreak given the young
122 age of the calves (< 2 days). FMDV neutralization test results showed exposure of 3 (out of 7
123 positives) gazelle calves to serotype O. Results of FMDV neutralization test in livestock showed
124 exposure to serotype O in one camel and four cattle (that were negative to FMDV tests and likely
125 showed reaction due to the vaccine). Additionally two cattle had antibodies reacting to serotypes,
126 O, Asia-1, A and C, four more cattle to serotypes O and Asia-1 and one cow to serotypes O, Asia-
127 1 and A. All adult gazelles (16 juveniles and 20 adults) sampled in 2008 were negative for

¹ excluding one sheep and one goat sample that were mistakenly left out of the shipment

128 FMDV exposure. The Chi-Square test results ($\chi^2=18.99$; $p < 0.001$; $df=1$) show that the
129 seroprevalence in adult gazelles declined significantly in 2008 compared to the 2001 study.

130 **DISCUSSION**

131 The goal of this project was to investigate the potential role of Mongolian gazelle in
132 epizootic FMD in Eastern Steppe of Mongolia, specifically to determine if FMD seroprevalence
133 in gazelles declined in the absence of ongoing outbreaks of FMD in livestock and, if FMD
134 seroprevalence in gazelle reflects the dynamics in livestock. In this study we demonstrated that
135 FMD seroprevalence in gazelles declined from 2001 (during an active outbreak of FMD) to 2008,
136 when no outbreaks of FMD were detected on the Eastern Steppe subsequent to February, 2004
137 (Table 2). Second, this study along with previous work in Mongolia demonstrates that patterns
138 of seroprevalence in gazelle reflect dynamics of FMD in livestock across the Eastern Steppe of
139 Mongolia: 0% seroprevalence during outbreak-free years in livestock, 1998-1999 (Deem et al.,
140 2001, this study), 67% seroprevalence during a concurrent FMD outbreak in livestock in 2001
141 (Nyamsuren et al. 2006), and declining seroprevalence in the gazelle population following
142 periods without livestock outbreaks, during which livestock vaccination occurred. Based on these
143 observations, we hypothesize that the Mongolian gazelle population is not a reservoir for FMD on
144 the Eastern Steppe, but rather that the virus enters the gazelle population after spillover from
145 livestock outbreaks.

146 The episodic history of FMD in our study region supports this hypothesis of spillover to
147 gazelles from domestic livestock. Outbreaks of FMDV serotypes O and A occurred periodically
148 in both domestic livestock and gazelles from 1931-1973, but subsequently there was a gap in
149 outbreak occurrence in both livestock and gazelles for almost 30 years. The FMDV serotype O

150 re-emerged in Mongolia in 2000 after outbreaks occurred elsewhere in Central Asia (Leforban
151 and Gerbier, 2002; Sakamoto and Yoshida, 2002), and was present until 2004, infecting both
152 livestock and gazelles (Shiilegdamba et al. 2008). Furthermore, FMDV serotype Asia-1 emerged
153 in August of 2005 on the Eastern Steppe as part of an Asia-wide panzootic and the genetic
154 lineages show close connections with that of China and Russia (Valarcher et al. 2009). The latest
155 FMD outbreak occurred in Mongolia in May of 2010 (FMDV-O) on the Eastern Steppe of
156 Mongolia, and also followed outbreaks of FMDV-O that occurred in China, Russia, Korea and
157 Japan. Based on OIE reports, it appears that FMD outbreaks in Mongolia tend to follow
158 outbreaks in neighboring countries (Table 2), suggesting that livestock and wildlife in Mongolia
159 may be exposed to FMD during pan-Asia epizootics.

160 For logistical reasons, we relied on serum collected from newborn calves in 2005 and
161 2007. The presence of FMDV-NS antibodies in the serum of newborn gazelle calves likely
162 indicates maternal exposure to FMDV given the young age of the calves (< 2 days). We make
163 this assumption on studies demonstrating cattle calf seroprevalence reflects that of the mother
164 (Graves, 1963; Stone 1960) given the intake of colostrums within 30 minutes of birth and that
165 buffalo calves have maternal antibodies for the first 3-8 months of life (Bastos et al., 2000).

166 The introduction of FMD to Mongolia livestock and gazelles during pan-Asia epizootics
167 is one hypothesis to explain the episodic history of FMD on the Eastern Steppe. However, an
168 alternative hypothesis exists: that FMD persists in domestic livestock in Mongolia, in particular
169 in small domestic ruminants. The role of small domestic ruminants in the transmission of FMD
170 is often overlooked but they have been identified as carriers and ideal reservoirs for further
171 infection of FMD (Gilbert et al., 2005). Studies also report that small ruminants can become
172 carriers of FMD after recovery from the disease and as vaccinated animals exposed to the virus

173 (Barnett, 1999). Although there were no reports of clinical FMD outbreaks during our
174 surveillance activities (2005-2007 and 2008) our serology results suggest FMD virus was
175 circulating on the Eastern Steppe in Mongolia during this time. It appears that current livestock
176 vaccination programs against FMDV serotype, O, A and Asia-1 have prevented clinical outbreaks
177 of FMDV on the Eastern Steppe and the presence of a few infected animals might either be
178 undetected or die off naturally (Gilbert et al., 2005). Therefore, we may not see large outbreaks
179 among livestock that go undetected. Gilbert et al., (2005) stated that higher affinity of FMD type
180 O towards sheep could explain its higher persistence in Turkey. This can be true for Mongolia, as
181 sheep and goats represent the highest livestock population density about 39 million out of 44
182 million livestock (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2009). A longitudinal study of FMD
183 infection in livestock and gazelle, alongside genetic comparison of viral isolates to isolates from
184 elsewhere in Asia during a panzootic, is necessary to fully understand FMD presence and
185 circulation on the Eastern Steppe.

186 **CONCLUSION**

187 If our hypothesis that Mongolian gazelles become exposed to FMD after spillover from
188 domestic livestock is correct, then management actions targeted at gazelles such as culling or
189 fencing to control movements (e.g., reviewed by Taylor and Martin, 1987) are unnecessary and
190 likely ineffective to control FMD on Mongolia's Eastern Steppe. Furthermore, Mongolian
191 gazelles are one of the few remaining species that maintains a long distance migration (Berger,
192 2004), and have declined greatly in numbers, so that the impact of inappropriate management
193 measures that decrease their population numbers or limit their access to current habitat could
194 have disastrous consequences for the species. In this case, FMD prevention and eradication
195 activities should rely on standard livestock disease management actions that have been successful

196 in controlling FMD elsewhere: serological surveillance, vaccination, and judicious culling of
197 livestock when determined necessary, after taking into account surveillance findings. This study
198 contributes to the evidence that clinical outbreaks of FMD in landscapes in which domestic and
199 wild ungulates graze together can be controlled through livestock vaccination. The information
200 obtained through this study is also useful for conservation strategies for the species.

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276 **Table 1.** Antibody seroprevalence for foot and mouth disease virus type O (FMDV-O) on the
 277 Eastern Steppe of Mongolia, 2005-2007. Seroprevalence due to vaccination (FMDV-O) and
 278 natural infection (FMDV-NS) are provided separately. Percentages in parentheses are 95%
 279 Adjusted Wald confidence intervals (Agresti and Coull, 1998).

Species	Year	Number tested	FMDV-O (Vacc.)	% Pos (CI)	FMDV-NS	% Pos (CI)
Camel	2005	89	9	9.2 (4.9-16.5)	1	1.1 (.2-6.0)
	2006	20	0	0 (0-16.1)	0	0 (0-16.1)
	2007	30	11	26.8 (15.7-41.9)	0	0 (0-11.4)
Camel total		139	20	12.6 (8.3-18.6)	1	0.7 (0.1-3.9)
Cattle	2005	89	34	27.6 (20.5-36.1)	4	4.3 (1.7-10.5)
	2006	19	4	17.4 (6.9-37.1)	0	0 (0-16.8)
	2007	30	23	43.4 (30.9-56.7)	3	9.1 (3.1-23.6)
Cattle total		138	61	30.7 (24.7-37.4)	7	4.8 (2.3-9.6)
Goat	2005	90	28	23.7 (16.9-32.2)	0	0 (0-4.1)
	2006	20	4	16.7 (6.7-35.9)	1	4.8 (0.9-22.7)
	2007	30	11	26.8 (15.7-41.9)	0	0 (0-11.4)
Goat total		140	43	23.5 (17.9-30.2)	1	0.7 (0.13-3.9)
Sheep	2005	88	29	24.8 (17.9-33.3)	0	0 (0-4.2)
	2006	20	1	4.8 (0.9-22.7)	1	4.8 (0.9-22.7)
	2007	30	14	31.8 (20-46.6)	1	3.2 (0.6-16.2)
Sheep total		138	44	24.2 (18.5-30.2)	2	1.4 (0.4-5.0)
Livestock Total		555	168	23.2 (20.3-26.5)	11	1.9 (1.1-3.5)
Mongolian Gazelle - calves						
Gazelle - calves	2005	30	0	0	4	11.8 (4.7-26.6)
	2006	0	-	-	-	-
	2007	27	0	0	3	9.1 (3.1-23.6)
Adults	2008	36	0	0	0	0 (7.1)
Gazelle Total		93	0	0	7	10.9 (5.4-20.9)

281 **Table 2.** Timing of foot and mouth disease outbreaks in Mongolia and in neighboring
 282 countries from 1999-2010, reported to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).
 283 Data from <http://www.oie.int/wahid-prod/public.php?page=home>.

Year	Outbreaks in Mongolia	Serotype	Previous outbreaks in neighboring countries
1999	none reported	-	China PR
2000	April, May	O	Russia, Kazakhstan, China-Taipei, Korea, Japan
2001	Feb-March, May	O	Kazakhstan
2002	July	O	Korea
2003	none reported	-	
2004	February	O	Russia
2005	August	Asia 1	Russia, China PR
2006	none reported ¹	-	Russia, China PR
2009	none reported	-	China PR
2010	May	O	China PR, Korea, Japan

284 ¹ FMDV-O was reported among the livestock owned by the School of Veterinary Medicine
 285 and Biotechnology within Ulaanbaatar, the capital city (ProMED-Mail Archive Number
 286 20060424.1201). The outbreak was not reported to the OIE and was contained to these
 287 captive livestock.

288 **Figure 1.**

289 Map of livestock and Mongolian gazelle *Procapra gutturosa* sample collection sites from
290 Dornod province of Mongolia. Livestock sampling site is marked as a polygon since herders
291 move around at different seasons with livestock and Mongolian gazelle sampling sites are
292 marked by sampling years.

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