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I Think my chicken has Gapeworm (backyard poultry)

After 42 years of avian practice (California and then South Carolina more recently), I have never diagnosed a case of *Syngamus trachea*. While it may be more common in wildlife, not in my world, never found in pet birds nor poultry. However, we seem to be dealing with popular myths in the Southeast about this elusive parasite. As far as I can tell, this may have started with a dog/cat hospital submitting a fecal sample to a dog/cat lab and mistaken for *Capillaria*, which can be more common and serious.

So, informal surveys of three Southern state diagnostic labs: zero diagnosis of a large number of poultry submissions for many years. Consult with colleagues, who are poultry-certified diplomate veterinarians in other Atlantic states: same answer- zero. Consultation with pathologists from my native state of CA- 1000 poultry submissions per year- no gapeworm for years.

But yet, due to those dreaded internet sites, of “experts” giving bad advice, everywhere you turn, gapeworm is a problem, in the absence of a single confirmed fecal or necropsy diagnosis.

What follows is bad advice for ineffective and extra-label wormers with sub-therapeutic dosages that would not be effective if worms were a problem.

So what is going on? Usually a lack of diagnosis and bad advice from some character on an internet group.

I never prescribe worming treatment in the absence of proof of infection.

The clinical signs seen by owners are usually due to Mycoplasma, viruses, bacteria or fungi. Improved molecular diagnostics can often pinpoint these problems, even if not curable. Otherwise, submitting a freshly dead chicken to your state lab for a complete necropsy, provides valuable information for a flock.

Routine fecal screen is the rational thing to do, during a veterinary visit. Typically we find either no parasites or that the worming program (for parasites other than gapeworm) is ineffective.

Heterakis and *Ascaridia* are a couple of poultry worms that do exist in some backyard flocks. Proper husbandry/management is important, as these two worms don't cause a lot of problems, unless the parasite load is very high.