Update Wednesday 11th Jan, 2017 Melbourne Bird Vet Clinic – Dr. Colin Walker

Progress. Some technical stuff

I have had contact with Dr Christina McCowan at Agribio today. Christina is guiding the gene sequencing process. She advises that the sequencing is taking a bit longer than envisaged and will not be completed until early next week. This is still very quick. We were hoping that the results would be available this week but there are constraints on this process. She has also advised that the embryos from virus isolation are showing positive changes that are consistent with viral, possibly Reo viral disease. She will look at them histologically and Agribio will examine the fluids in various ways, mainly molecular. She is also expecting more electron microscopy (EM) from AAHL within the next week.

Agribio is sending some tissues to Prof Amir Noormohammadi at the University of Melbourne so that he can run the chicken Reo PCR that his department has developed on Victorian samples. The positive results reported earlier were done on WA pigeon samples

Crossroads

The next week is a pivotal one for the Australian pigeon community. The sequencing results and then their comparison with the available vaccines will determine whether we will be applying to import a vaccine or need to make one in Victoria. The 2 authorities who need to OK the import of a vaccine are the APVMA and Biosecurity Risk assessment. I have spoken to both the APVMA and Biosecurity. The APVMA indicated that, with a critical national need (as here), they could issue an import permit in 1-3 months. Biosecurity will take longer; they estimate 3-6 months to issue their permits. If the sequencing indicates likely cross immunity and the permit application process proceeds smoothly, then this would mean the entire country can race and show this year even if this means for some organisations starting their season a bit later or running a compressed or shorter season. To make a vaccine would take 18 months so this means potentially no competition. I have been advised that it is important that the decision makers are made aware of a critical national need. To this end, I will endeavour to set up meetings with Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer in Canberra (as we did with the PMV) outbreak and also the Minister, Mr Barnaby Joyce.
I have contacted both Zoetis and Intervet and arranged to forward the sequencing results as soon as they are available to their experts so they can evaluate the potential for cross immunity from their chicken vaccines to pigeons.

USA

As many fanciers are aware, there are reports from the USA about a mystery disease killing large numbers of pigeons there. Some Australian fanciers have been concerned that it may be the same disease as in Australia. I have contacted a number of my US veterinary colleagues and have been advised that a number of these cases have been diagnosed as PMV. Other cases are still being investigated. I will make veterinary results available as I receive them

New cases

Since Monday eleven new lofts have either been confirmed or are under strong suspicion of having the disease. One is in Dandenong. The rest are all in Melbourne's north west. Of these, three are non- racing lofts

Correct PMV dose

There has been a suggestion that the dose for PMV vaccine is too high and that the vaccine in its adjuvant (i.e. its carrier or base) predisposes the birds to illness and infertility. A dose of 0.25 ml has been suggested. The recommended dose of both Poulvac and Neucovac killed La Sota vaccines in Australia is 0.5 ml twice, 4 weeks apart. The dose of 0.5 ml was proposed by the Consultative Committee for Emergency Animal Disease (CCEAD). It was also the dose used during the 18-month vaccine trial that was conducted in 2013. One of the principal aims of the 18-month PMV vaccine trial that was conducted in 2013 was to ensure that the suggested vaccine protocol did the pigeons no harm. No harm could be demonstrated. The test results passed the rigorous standards of the APVMA enabling Pfizer/Zoetis to register the vaccine for use in pigeons. The trial was also published in the prestigious peer-reviewed Australian Veterinary Journal. These ultimate authorities were happy with the conclusions that the suggested protocol was not harmful to pigeons and conferred strong immunity. The killed La Sota-based vaccine used in Australia is used in many counties around the world including the UK and USA. It has been suggested that the dose of 0.5 ml is not the manufacturer's recommendation. I emailed today Mr Phil Lehrbach who is in charge of Zoetis' (the vaccine's manufacturer) product distribution for Australasia and SE Asia. He advised that the dose is 0.5 ml. There are other brands of La Sota vaccine available in the world where the recommendation is that a different volume be injected. Unlike some other drugs, the vaccine volume is not based on weight but the level of activity of the vaccine. This means that a stronger vaccine may require a lower injection volume. People and particularly media who advise a different, particularly lower dose rate must be prepared to accept responsibility for pigeons catching PMV because fanciers followed their advice and gave a different dose that failed to develop protective immunity in their birds. They should also be prepared to back up such opinions with published peer-reviewed scientific data (as with the recommended dose) rather than just someone's theory. Fanciers should give PMV vaccine at a dose of 0.5 ml twice, 4 weeks apart, and should be confident that the vaccine is not harming their birds.