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SHORT COMMUNICATION

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Helminth fauna of the stoat (*Mustela erminea* Linnaeus, 1758) and the weasel (*M. nivalis* Linnaeus, 1758) in Belorussian Polesie

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Abstract Helminthological examinations of 30 stoat and 31 weasel carcasses were carried out in Belorussian Polesie (southern part of Belarus, Brest and Gomel regions) between 1980 and 1999. The total rate of helminth infection of these animals was 78.7%. A total of 23 stoats and 25 weasels were infected by helminths. The animals were hosts for 20 species of helminths.

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Table 1 Helminth infection of stoats and weasels in Belorussian Polesie

Helminth species	Number of:			
	Infected animals		Helminths (min–max values)	
	Stoat	Weasel	Stoat	Weasel
Trematoda				
Alaria alata (Goeze, 1782) larvae	1	1	500 in both animals	
Apophallus donicus (Skrjabin et Lindtrop, 1919)	1	1	3	5
Isthmiophora melis (Schrank, 1788)	10	7	1–12	1–10
Opisthorchis felineus (Rivolta, 1884)	1	1	2	3
Pseudamphistomum truncatum (Rudolphi, 1819)	1	1	4	5
Cestoda				
Mesocestoides lineatus (Goeze, 1782)	1	1	3	2
Spirometra erinacei (Rudolphi, 1819) larvae	3	2	1–2	1–3
Taenia mustelae Gmelin, 1780	2	1	1–4	3
Nematoda				
Baylisascaris devosi (Sprent, 1952)	2	2	1–2	1–4
Capillaria mucronata (Molin, 1858)	12	10	1–7	1–5
C. putorii (Rudolphi, 1819)	10	6	1–10	1–9
Crenosoma taiga Skrjabin et Petrow, 1928	1	1	3	2
Filaroides martis (Werner, 1782)	11	6	1–2	1–3
Molineus patens Petrow, 1928	6	7	1–7	1–6
Skrjabingylus nasicola Petrow, 1927	12	9	1–14	1–12
Spirocerca lupi (Rudolphi, 1809) larvae	1	1	3	4
Strongyloides martis Petrow, 1940	1	1	4	3
Thominx aerophilus (Creplin, 1839)	1	4	2	1–5
Trichinella sp. larvae	1	1	5 in compressorium in both animals	
Acanthocephala				
Macracanthorhynchus catulinus Kostylew, 1927 larvae	1	1	3	2

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The total rate of helminth infection of these animals was 78.7%. A total of 23 stoats and 25 weasels were infected by helminths. The animals were hosts for 20 species of helminths. The results of the helminthological examination are presented in Table 1.

Capillaria mucronata, *C. putorii*, *Filaroides martis*, *Isthmiophora melis*, *Skrjabingylus nasicola* and *Molineus patens* were the most frequently registered parasites. The prevalence of each of these helminths in stoat and weasel carcasses was 27.9%, 36.1%, 26.2%, 27.9%, 34.4% and 21.3%, respectively. The number of parasites varied over 1–14 specimens/host. *C. putorii*, *I. melis* and *M. patens* were localized in the intestine (*C. putorii* was also found in the stomach), *C. mucronata* was detected in the urinary bladder, *F. martis* in knots beside the bronchial tubes and *S. nasicola* in the frontal sinuses.

Stoats and weasels harboured the same helminths. This was probably due to the fact that both these mustelid animals share the same living-space and diet. For example, both animals visit bodies of water, eat fish and thus may acquire infection by *Apophallus donicus*, *Opisthorchis felineus* and *Pseudamphistomum truncatum*. Amphibians are a potential source of infection by *Alaria alata*, *Isthmiophora melis* and *Spirometra erinacei*, insects may be a source of *Macracanthorhynchus catulinus* and *Spirocerca lupi*, earthworms of the family Lumbricidae may be a source of *Thominx aerophilus*; and small rodents may be a source of *Alaria alata*, *Mesocestoides lineatus*, *Taenia mustelae* and *Trichinella* sp.

All trematode species, two cestode species (*Spirometra erinacei*, *M. lineatus*), three nematode species (*Thominx aerophilus*, *Spirocera lupi*, *Trichinella* sp.) and the acanthocephalan *Macracanthorhynchus catulinus* are very important for medical and veterinary science. All these helminth species are known to occur in domestic animals (cats, dogs) and humans (except *M. catulinus*).