Cats may be ‘missing piece’ to *Toxocara* puzzle

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One of the UK’s leading parasitologists believes cats could be the “missing piece in the jigsaw” when it comes to controlling *Toxocara*.

*Toxocara* species adults. Image from the article "Controversies and practicalities of human toxocarosis control" by Ian Wright.

Vet Ian Wright is the lead author of a study exploring the prevalence of clinically relevant intestinal nematodes in cats and dogs, using the sensitive faecal analysis technique FLOTAC.

The results regarding dogs were as expected, but researchers were surprised to find *Toxocara* parasites in 26% of cats – a higher prevalence than previously thought.

**Limited research**

Only limited research on the prevalence of *Toxocara* and related worms has been conducted in the UK to date and Dr Wright wanted to discover how common it was and how many cats and dogs were at risk.

“What was surprising, and what’s been overlooked, was the fact cats are shedding high numbers of *Toxocara* eggs, too,” he said.

“I suspect cats are a big missing piece in the jigsaw of *Toxocara* control. The focus to date has been very much on dogs, which is important, but we perhaps need to turn our attention more to cats.”
Details of study

Faecal samples were collected from 171 domestic dogs (90 male and 81 female) and 131 domestic cats (63 male and 68 female) from urban areas of Lancashire.

*Toxocara* was present in 5.3% of dogs, as predicted. Another surprise was the discovery of a worm called *Spirocerca lupi*, which is not thought to be endemic in the UK. *S lupi* is not dangerous to people, but can cause oesophageal tumours and spinal problems in dogs.

The worms were only found in low numbers and did not appear to be causing pets any problems. However, researchers say the discovery warrants further investigation and an increased awareness of the clinical signs *S lupi* can cause.

- More details about the study can be found in the 3 October issue of *Veterinary Times*. 