Otitis Externa as the Only Manifestation of Canine Demodicosis

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Although demodicosis is frequently mentioned (textbooks, continuing education articles, and lectures) as a cause of otitis externa in dogs, most information is anecdotal. For instance, demodicosis is (1) listed as a cause of canine otitis externa (no details provided), and (2) said to usually produce external ear canal involvement only when the face is also involved (no studies cited).

In 4 large retrospective studies of otitis externa in dogs (total of 10,061 cases), demodicosis was identified as causal in only 13 dogs. Only one dog (0.01%) had exclusive ear canal involvement.

While completing a retrospective record review of all dogs examined by the Dermatology Service at Cornell University from 1988 through 1998, I collected data on only 1 dog with demodicosis restricted to the external ear canals. The patient was a 2-year-old, intact male Airedale terrier with a 3-month history of pruritic otitis externa. Previous treatment with ear cleansers and a polypharmaceutical (antibiotic, antifungal, glucocorticoid) otic preparation had been unsuccessful.

The dog had bilateral ceruminous otitis externa, was otherwise healthy, and had no history of skin disease prior to the onset of otitis externa. Ear swabs revealed large numbers of live *Demodex canis* mites (Fig. 1). The dog was treated every 3 days with a rotenone-mineral oil otic preparation, and was fully recovered in 30 days (normal physical examination, negative ear swabs). The dog remained healthy for a follow-up period of 5 years.

It would appear that canine demodicosis isolated to the ear canals is an extremely rare disorder. The dog reported here accounted for only 1 of 8,207 dogs (0.01%) examined during an 11-year period.

References


Fig. 1. Swab of ear debris in mineral oil. Note 2 adult *Demodex canis* mites, 200X.

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