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Parasite load of European brown hares in Austria and the Czech Republic

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The parasite load of brown hares (*Lepus europaeus*) is of great interest to hunting ground managers and veterinarians. We compared the prevalence and intensity of parasitic infections in 362 hares from Austria and the Czech Republic with respect to age and body weight. Samples of the entire gastrointestinal tract, liver and lungs were collected during autumn hunting events in 2007. The parasite spectrum of hares included *Protostrongylus pulmonalis, Graphidium strigosum, Trichostrongylus retortaeformis, Trichuris leporis, Eimeria* spp. and tapeworms. The most prevalent gastrointestinal nematode was *Trichostrongylus retortaeformis*, while only individual specimens of tapeworms such as *Andrya rhopalocephala, Mosgovoyia pectinata, Cittotaenia denticulata* and *Ctenotaenia ctenoides* were found in subadult hares. A single hare was infected with *Cysticercus pisiformis* in Austria. Lungworms *Protostrongylus pulmonalis* and findings of pneumonia were significantly less prevalent in subadult than adult hares ($P < 0.01$) from both countries and were much less prevalent overall in the Czech Republic ($P < 0.01$). *Graphidium strigosum*, *Trichostrongylus retortaeformis*, *Eimeria* spp. and enteritis were more prevalent in subadult hares. The nematode *Trichuris leporis*, on the other hand, prevailed in adults. The body weight of adult hares was negatively correlated with the intensity of infection by *Protostrongylus pulmonalis* ($r = –0.67$) and *Trichostrongylus retortaeformis* ($r = –0.73$) and the parasite loads served as significant weight predictors in multiple regression equations. This study revealed that parasitic infections of the lungs and intestines influences the health and decreases the body weight of hares in Austrian and Czech hunting grounds.

Keywords:

Lepus europaeus; gastrointestinal parasites; lungworms; coccidia; body weight

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