

Molecular Identification of Camel Tick and Investigation of Its Natural Infection by Rickettsia and Borrelia in Saudi Arabia

Authors : Reem Alajmi, Hind Al Harbi, Tahany Ayaad, Zainab Al Musawi

Abstract : Hard ticks *Hyalomma* spp. (family: Ixodidae) are obligate ectoparasite in their all life stages on some domestic animals mainly camels and cattle. Ticks may lead to many economic and public health problems because of their blood feeding behavior. Also, they act as vectors for many bacterial, viral and protozoan agents which may cause serious diseases such as tick-borne encephalitis, Rocky-mountain spotted fever, Q-fever and Lyme disease which can affect human and/or animals. In the present study, molecular identification of ticks that attack camels in Riyadh region, Saudi Arabia based on the partial sequence of mitochondrial 16s rRNA gene was applied. Also, the present study aims to detect natural infections of collected camel ticks with *Rickettsia* spp. and *Borrelia* spp. using PCR/hybridization of Citrate synthase encoding gene present in bacterial cells. Hard ticks infesting camels were collected from different camels located in a farm in Riyadh region, Saudi Arabia. Results of the present study showed that the collected specimens belong to two species: *Hyalomma dromedarii* represent 99% of the identified specimens and *Hyalomma marginatum* which account for 1 % of identified ticks. The molecular identification was made through blasting the obtained sequence of this study with sequences already present and identified in GeneBank. All obtained sequences of *H. dromedarii* specimens showed 97-100% identity with the same gene sequence of the same species (Accession # L34306.1) which was used as a reference. Meanwhile, no intraspecific variations of *H. marginatum* measured because only one specimen was collected. Results also had shown that the intraspecific variability between individuals of *H. dromedarii* obtained in 92 % of samples ranging from 0.2- 6.6%, while the remaining 7 % of the total samples of *H. dromedarii* showed about 10.3 % individual differences. However, the interspecific variability between *H. dromedarii* and *H. marginatum* was approximately 18.3 %. On the other hand, by using the technique of PCR/hybridization, we could detect natural infection of camel ticks with *Rickettsia* spp. and *Borrelia* spp. Results revealed the natural presence of both bacteria in collected ticks. *Rickettsia* spp. infection present in 29% of collected ticks, while 35% of collected specimen were infected with *Borrelia* spp. The valuable results obtained from the present study are a new record for the molecular identification of camel ticks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and their natural infection with both *Rickettsia* spp. and *Borrelia* spp. These results may help scientists to provide a good and direct control strategy of ticks in order to protect one of the most important economic animals which are camels. Also results of this project spotlight on the disease that might be transmitted by ticks to put out a direct protective plan to prevent spreading of these dangerous agents. Further molecular studies are needed to confirm the results of the present study by using other mitochondrial and nuclear genes for tick identification.

Keywords : Camel ticks, *Rickettsia* spp. , *Borrelia* spp. , mitochondrial 16s rRNA gene

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