Ixodid ticks of African buffalo (Syncerus caffer), impala (Aepyceros melampus) and elephant (Loxodonta africana) in five protected park estates in the Zambezi valley, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Wildlife hosts many pathogens of economic importance and is considered as a reservoir of important tick-borne diseases of livestock in southern Africa. The species composition of ticks parasitizing buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), impala (*Aepyceros melampus*) and elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) was investigated in five protected parks in the Zambezi valley, Zimbabwe. A total of 1104 adult ticks was collected from 75 adult animals comprising five buffaloes, five elephants and five impalas drawn from five protected wildlife parks. Five tick species belonging to two genera were recovered, with *Rhipicephalus decoloratus* being the most prevalent species in all the three animal groups. *Amblyomma hebraeum* was only recovered from buffaloes whereas *Rhipicephalus zambeziensis* was recovered from buffalos and elephants. Significant differences in mean tick species distribution and concentration were observed amongst the wildlife parks and these appeared to be influenced by the number of hosts in each park. The study revealed that buffaloes are the major host of *R. decoloratus* in the Zambezi valley. The presence of these ixodid ticks within the Zambezi valley may have significant ecological and economic impacts on wildlife conservation, domestic animals and human health.

Keywords

Ixodid ticks *Rhipicephalu*s spp. Wildlife Zambezi valley Zimbabwe

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