Unraveling the life cycle of *Santa claus*

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Journal of Extrapolated Biology, 2012: 345-446

Little has been known about the procreation and complex life-cycle of Santa claus *(also known as the "Christmas parasite"). It is not for want of interest, but rather lack of funds and perseverance. In this report we present our preliminary findings on the complex life-cycle of* S. claus*, in particular its hosts rodent and crow. We will show that* S. claus *is oviparous, but with the unique behavior of carrying its egg in its arms (approximating the marsupials). Furthermore, gastro-intestinal footage from a decaying crow clearly proves that the well know whistling behavior to be an instinct and present the first larval stage. Further results will follow as these investigation yielded the first known captive* S. claus.

Santa claus, rare species, parasite, life-cycle

Introduction

The earliest written manifests on S. claus come from early middle ages [1, 2]. It has a prominent position in folk-lore [2] and after the invention of television, in mass culture [3]. However, with the growth of popularity in culture it has been widely assumed among adults to be a myth, or a children's tale.

In early 19th-century, Francis Morrant, a Benedictine monk, wrote a long forgotten monograph on the biology of *S. claus*. The document is referred to in the monastery's annals [4], but the original is believed to be lost. This is to our knowledge, the only known description of the biology, life and habits of *S. claus* from a scientific perspective.

Using literary studies of fictive accounts [5- 10] as proxy for truth, it was estimated that *S. claus* be especially active and visible in the period November - February. A common theme proved to be the snow covered ground. These two detailed were used in deciding to deposit image traps before first snow and to focus on northern regions.

Materials and Methods

Image Traps

Fifteen motion activated cameras were deployed in northern Scandinavia during late September. Location are described in Appendix A along with the geographic coordinates. Each station was equipped with extended battery power to last through the winter period.

Computer Vision

A special purpose *S. claus* image recognition software was developed and can be freely downloaded as supplementary material. The software was trained to detect *S. claus* among a set of common winter animals in the region.

The software was installed on the image traps and made to send a signal via satellite upon *S. claus* detection.

Field observation

Camp was established in the proximity of positive sighting and scientists took turns (6h) in watching a rodent carcass.

Crow was caught after seen feeding on rodent with net not supplied for the purpose of catching birds.

Endoscopy

The crow was brought to the laboratory for further investigations and endoscopy performed according to standard protocol.

Results

One of the image traps sent a signal for positive *S. claus* sighting on the 21st December 2011. Scientists were deployed to the sight and

Figure A

discovered a dead rodent withing the visual field of the camera. The images (see Figure A) showed positive account of *S. claus* infecting rodents.

The crow caught at seen was infected with what was determined to be the first instar of *S. claus*, hence referred to as L1 (see Figure B).

Figure B

Discussion

The results clearly show what children and some people have long claimed: *S. claus* is not only a cherished fictional character and gifts giver, but also a parasite with two known types of hosts: rodent and bird.

The findings put Santa-research back into the room of respectable science, where it belongs. It is our strong belief that further research will completely unravel the complex life-cycle and the traits that this unique species exhibits.

As a final remark, in present times of species mass extinction, we must prioritize shy and rare endemic species. The first step is to study them. And think of to loss to the world, should the last living *S. claus* die. What would we tell our children?

The author has no conflicts of interest to declared.

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