

Novel *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* Complex Pathogen, *M. mungi*

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Seven outbreaks involving increasing numbers of banded mongoose troops and high death rates have been documented. We identified a *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex pathogen, *M. mungi* sp. nov., as the causative agent among banded mongooses that live near humans in Chobe District, Botswana. Host spectrum and transmission dynamics remain unknown.

A previously unidentified *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex pathogen has emerged in banded mongooses (*Mungos mungo*) in Botswana; we named the pathogen mongoose bacillus, or *M. mungi* sp. nov. This pathogen causes high mortality rates among banded mongooses that live in close association with humans because these animals live in human-made structures and scavenge human waste, including feces.

Banded mongooses are social, fossorial, viverrids that feed on invertebrates and small mammals including subterranean species (1). We initially identified tuberculosis (TB) disease in banded mongooses in 2000. The outbreak appeared to spread as a point-source infection between mongoose troops living in close association with humans and human waste; infection spread through towns and the associated national park (2). During 2000–2010, a total of 7 outbreaks occurred (increasing in duration), mongoose troop involvement increased, and the spatial and temporal connection between cases decreased. Infected mongoose troops are now widely identified across the landscape, in-

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DOI: 10.3201/eid1608.100314

cluding protected areas and urban centers (Figure 1), and high mortality rates threaten the survival of smaller troops. In this study area of Chobe District, Botswana, TB has been identified in only humans and mongooses. Strain assessment of human TB has not been conducted; the full host spectrum and transmission dynamics of this pathogen, currently unknown, are the focus of our ongoing research.

The Study

During 2000–2010 in Chobe District, Botswana, we performed 38 necropsies on macroscopically TB-positive mongooses, of which 18 were further evaluated and TB was confirmed by histopathologic examination. An in-depth histologic evaluation was performed on a subsample of 8 of these animals from the 2008 outbreak. The most striking feature identified in the sick mongooses was anorexia, followed by nasal distortion and, less commonly, erosions of the nasal planum with involvement of the hard palate. For 7 of the 8 TB-positive animals examined intensively, macroscopic lesions were noted on the nasal planum. Histologic examination detected unequivocal TB lesions in the skin of the nose and the anterior nasal mucosa. Our findings suggested entry of the organism through erosions on the nasal planum, perhaps in association with abrasions, which might occur during foraging. Such lesions were present in the hairless parts of the nose tip of most TB-infected mongooses. Furthermore, granulomatous inflammation and mycobacterial organisms were found in the dermis of the skin directly below these erosions. Inflammation and organisms were present in some cases in the nasal mucosa, but erosion was not found. Thus, organisms could not have been in the lumen of the nasal cavity. This finding is consistent with pneumonic TB being present in only a few advanced cases of disseminated TB. This pattern was consistent among all animals examined postmortem during the study period. Histologically, the TB pneumonia was determined to be hematogenous rather than bronchogenous (i.e., by inhalation); thus, no evidence for aerosol transmission was found. Rather, pathogen invasion

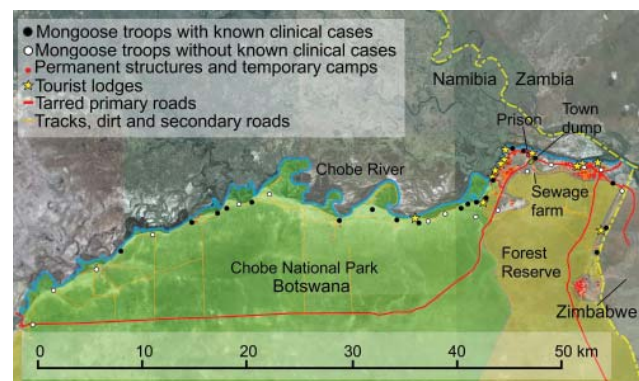


Figure 1. Locations of infected and unaffected banded mongoose troops and human infrastructural development, Chobe District, Botswana.

Table 2. Comparison of full 24-set MIRU-VNTR of selected *Mycobacterium mungi* isolates*

Sample no.	1883	6601B	6606A	6600B	6875	–	8163/02	24	287/99	7739/01	5358/99	8490/00	H37Rv
Year isolated	2000	2002	2002	2004	2008	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Species	<i>M. mungi</i>	<i>M. mungi</i>	<i>M. mungi</i>	<i>M. mungi</i>	<i>M. mungi</i>	DB	<i>M. a.</i>	OB	<i>M. microti</i>	<i>M. p.</i>	<i>M. caprae</i>	<i>M. bovis</i>	<i>M. t.</i>
MIRU 02	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
VNTR 0424/ Mtub04	3	3	3	3	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	2	2
VNTR 0577/ ETR-C	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4
MIRU 04/ ETR-D	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	4	5	3	4	2
MIRU 40	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
MIRU 10	5	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	5	6	6	2	3
MIRU 16	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	6	4	2	4	2
VNTR 1955/ Mtub21	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	2
MIRU 20	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2
VNTR 2163b/ QUB11b	0	No	No	No	No	7	5	No	6	9	4	4	5
VNTR 2165/ ETR-A	6	6	No	6	6	6	6	3	9	9	5	4	3
VNTR 2347/ Mtub29	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
VNTR 2401/ Mtub30	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	2
VNTR 2461/ ETR-B	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	3
MIRU 23	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	6
MIRU 24	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1
MIRU 26	4	4	3	3	4	5	4	4	2	2	4	3	3
MIRU 27	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	3	3
VNTR 3171/ Mtub34	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
MIRU 31/ ETR-E	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	5	5	4	1	3	5	3	3
VNTR 3690/ Mtub39	2	No	No	No	No	5	4	4	3	3	1	2	5
VNTR 4052/ QUB26	No	No	No	No	No	4	6	2	9	7	3	5	5
VNTR 4156/ QUB4156	No	No	No	No	No	3	3	3	3	0	3	1	2
MIRU 39	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

*MIRU, mycobacterial interspersed repetitive unit; VNTR, variable number tandem repeats; DB, Dassie bacillus; *M. a.*, *M. africanum*; OB, Oryx bacillus; *M. p.*, *M. pinnipedii*; *M. t.*, *M. tuberculosis*; –, not applicable.; no, no amplification. Gray shading highlights differences between the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex species and *M. mungi* as well as variation within *M. mungi* samples evaluated. DB data supplied by S. Parsons. OB data supplied by P. Supply. *M. africanum* West African 2 strain 8163/02 (ST181), *M. microti* strain 287/99 (ST539), *M. pinnipedii* strain 7739/01, *M. caprae* strain 5358/99 (ST647), *M. bovis* strain 8490/00 (ST482), and *M. tuberculosis* strain H37Rv data from www.miru-vntrplus.org.

bacillus, which had not been previously analyzed. Evidence of multiple *M. mungi* substrains circulating between years and within social groups (6601B and 6600B) in the same outbreak year (Table 2) suggests complexity in *M. mungi* transmission and potential evolution of the organism over the past decade.

Conclusions

This newly identified mycobacterial pathogen has many unique ecologic characteristics that set it apart from other members of the *M. tuberculosis* complex. First, it causes high numbers of deaths of banded mongooses,

threatening local extinction of smaller social groups. Second, rather than having a primary respiratory transmission route with direct transmission between individuals, as is characteristic of other *M. tuberculosis* complex species, *M. mungi* appears to infect banded mongooses by means of a nonrespiratory route through the nasal planum, suggestive of environmental transmission. Third, the time from clinical presentation to death for affected mongooses is generally short (2–3 months) compared with that for other *M. tuberculosis* complex pathogens (more chronic infection, can take years to progress to death). Acute illness and high mortality rates, as seen in banded mongooses with *M. mun-*

gi infection, have been associated with extremely isolated human communities newly exposed to TB (14).

Conventional laboratory culture, biochemical testing, and a limited molecular evaluation were insufficient for differentiating *M. mungi* from *M. tuberculosis* (2). Organism differentiation required an extensive suite of additional molecular assessments not available at that time, thus underscoring the difficulty of diagnosing *M. tuberculosis* complex agents correctly and the inability of most national health laboratories to do so. The fact that new host-adapted *M. tuberculosis* complex species continue to be identified illustrates the diversity within the *M. tuberculosis* complex and stresses the need for sensitive techniques for species differentiation. The identification of this previously unknown pathogen within the *M. tuberculosis* complex identifies new concerns for human and animal health and illustrates the continuing scope of the threat posed by TB pathogens.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the assistance of the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks. We also thank Tara Craig and Tiny Hlokwé for their assistance with this project.

The work was funded through a grant from National Geographic Society, WildZé Foundation, and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

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Technical Appendix

Table. Spoligotyping results for selected samples from 2000 to 2009

Sample no	Animal ID	Year	Month	Troop	Spoligotype
1882B	BM2344	2000	August	CSL	Mongoose bacillus type
1883	BM2345	2000	August	MSL	Mongoose bacillus type
6601B	BM M2F	2002	May	CGL	Mongoose bacillus type
6606A	BM M5M	2002	May	CGL	Mongoose bacillus type
6599D	BM203	2003	June	CL	Mongoose bacillus type
6600B	BM204	2004	September	CL	Mongoose bacillus type
6875	BM2308	2008	May	MSL	Mongoose bacillus type
8809	BM8809	2009	June	SEF	Mongoose bacillus type