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Argentina's SENASA Blames Mouse for Animal Mutilations

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One of more than an estimated 300 Argentina cows since April 2002 whose jaw flesh was stripped clean to the bone; eye, tongue, and often ears removed; pharynx and larynx removed deep within the throat, along with other bloodless excisions of genitals and rectal tissue.

"Veterinarian Alberto Pariani, D.V.M., at the University of La Pampa in General Pico has never even heard of this 'hocicudo rojizo' mouse. ... Dr. Pariani was especially surprised by the official statements in the press conference because he has not seen any fecal droppings from foxes, birds or mice on any of the mutilated animals he has examined."

Reed Lindsay, Freelance Newspaper Reporter, Buenos Aires



INFORMACION DE PRENSA

INFORME OFICIAL SOBRE LESIONES Y MUTILACIONES DE CADÁVERES BOVINOS

El Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASA) difundió hoy el informe encomendado a la Universidad Nacional del Centro (UNICEN), de Tandil, donde se concluye que los decesos se produjeron por causas naturales y las lesiones fueron provocadas por animales predadores, entre los que se destaca un ratón del género *Oxymycterus*, conocido como "hocicudo rojizo", cuya población ha crecido recientemente y ha cambiado sus hábitos alimentarios.

Official Press Release on July 1, 2002 from SENASA, the National Health and Agroalimentary Quality Service in Buenos Aires, Argentina, about the intense wave of animal mutilations reported from at least eight provinces in Argentina since April 2002.

July 2, 2002 Buenos Aires, Argentina - The National Health and Agroalimentary Quality Service (SENASA) yesterday held a press conference in Buenos Aires to announce, as the press release above states, "Official Report Regarding Injuries and Mutilations to Bovine Carcasses." To most everyone's surprise, including ranchers and veterinarians who had examined dozens of the dead animals, SENASA's President, Bernardo Cane, announced that "studies performed on dead and mutilated animals have established that the deaths were the result of natural causes and the injuries were provoked by predators, among

them a rodent of the genus *Oxymycterus*, more commonly known as the 'hocicudo rojizo' (red muzzle) whose population has recently increased and whose nutritional habits have changed."



Oxymycterus, "hocicudo rojizo" (red muzzle), a rodent now officially blamed by Argentina federal officials for the animal mutilations in Argentina since April 2002. Photograph provided by SENASA, Buenos Aires.

A reporter at the SENASA press conference in Buenos Aires was Reed Lindsay, a freelancer who attended after spending time in Salliquelo and General Pico of northern La Pampa province to talk with ranchers and a couple of veterinarians who have seen dozens of dead cattle from which ears, eyes, jaw flesh, tongues, trachea, larynx, esophagus, genital organs and rectal tissue have been excised "surgically" and bloodlessly. The ground under the dead animals has not shown any signs of struggle or tracks. I talked with Reed today about the press conference and what he has learned the past few days in his research.

Interview:

Reed Lindsay, Freelance Newspaper Reporter for North American newspapers, currently based in Buenos Aires, Argentina: "SENASA summarized thirty cases that its laboratory analyses indicated 'signs of animal fecal matter' from the red muzzle mice, birds, armadillos and foxes on the dead carcasses. The officials say that the excisions "appear to be precise," but under the microscope are not precise. Dr. Cane and his SENASA veterinarian colleagues attending the press conference, said animal predators had eaten the tissues away.

Did anyone at this press conference challenge these conclusions?

No, but I think I was one of the only reports at the press conference who had actually gone out to the fields to talk with ranchers and veterinarians who had seen a lot of cases. Due to the economic crisis here, reporters in the national media are on very low budget and generally rely on stringers or wire services to get the news about what is going on outside Buenos Aires. There was not a lot of questioning going on by the media. Most people did not have any background about animal mutilations.

I did pose the question: how do you explain the contradiction between this mouse conclusion and the conclusion of professional veterinarians and ranchers out in the field with these cows every day and who say there is no way this could be the work of animals.

That veterinarian, Dr. Belot, said he was looking at cautery on the excisions.

People on my trip were a little more cautious about that because they said it was their suspicions, but Dr. Belot said he wanted to wait to see the results of the

test samples that he had sent to SENASA.

Did anyone at this press conference show a photomicrograph of an excision under a microscope as part of SENASA's official investigation?

No. Heat was not even talked about. There question was: are these precise cuts, either with a knife or with some kind of heat-producing instrument? Or are they the work of animals? In the presentation, they put up two photos. One photo was cow hide cut with a knife. The other was cow hide supposedly found in one of the mutilation cases. You could see under the microscope, how hide cut with the knife was a clean line, whereas the other cow hide was uneven.

Did anyone point out that predators including mice, birds and foxes have been around for centuries. Why would their natural predation suddenly look differently as excisions that stand out as precise and unusual to the ranchers and veterinarians?

Right. The officials said there would have to be more studies done with rodent experts. Further, their theory was that last year had a very warm summer. They speculated that perhaps there was a proliferation of these mice. This year it has been very cold in Argentina, one of the coldest winters in a long time. Thus, the food sources of insects and plants aren't as abundant as before and there are many more of them. So, there are a lot of hungry mice and they are going after the dead cows.

Veterinarian Alberto Pariani, University of La Pampa,
Has Never Heard of the Mouse

Interestingly, veterinarian Alberto Pariani, D.V.M. of the University of La Pampa in General Pico has never even heard of this 'homicudo rojizo' mouse. He said that he personally has gone out on four or five mutilations in the field and he's seen tissue samples from at least forty animals submitted to his lab at the University of La Pampa from other local veterinarians. Dr. Pariani was especially surprised by the official statements in the press conference because he has not seen any fecal animals of foxes, birds or mice on any of the mutilated animals he has examined.

Now, he's being very cautious. The only thing he will say on the record is he has definitely ruled out disease. But he told me, 'The types of excisions do not correlate with any known infectious disease. When animal predators eat, they rip and tear. They don't cut.' Everyone who has had experience working out on the ranches says the same thing: 'No animal can do this.'"

He said that to me on the record before the press conference. But now he's afraid of saying something publicly that will get him in trouble. But it's clear he had never heard of these mice before. It certainly was not his conclusion.

From my trip to northern La Pampa what impressed me the most was the consensus among veterinarians and ranchers out in the field who work in the small towns out in the pampas, working with cows every day. There was a clear consensus that this was not the work of animals, disease, natural causes. that this had to be by intelligent beings. There was also a consensus although most people would come out and say it publicly, that it is not human. This perspective includes the veterinarians, ranchers and even the police. The head of the state police in the area of General Pico. I spoke with him and he said there was no way people could be doing this without the police catching them.

I asked him, 'Is this the perfect crime, then?' He said, 'There is no such thing as the perfect crime.'

Fifty years and counting of such perfect crimes! Did you get photographs of any new cases?

I did on one case. Now, it's about five days old. The rancher found it on

Thursday, June 27, and we went out there on Saturday morning, June 29. We started at the police station. The veterinarian the day before had cut off the head for analysis and we saw the head first there in General Pico. The vet showed up as well and pointed out some of the things he thought were interesting.

It was a calf, about 120 pounds.

Male or female?

Female, I think. It was missing an eye. Missing an ear. Missing its tongue, pharynx and larynx. the facial muscles were gone in what appeared to be a precise cut.

Then after examining the calf's head, we went to the nearby ranch to see the rest of the carcass there. In the chest area, there was a hole of missing flesh. It was pretty much a circular cut. The vet said that the day before when he cut off the head and took it to the police station that the round hole was not there in the chest. The police agree as well, the ones who went to the pasture with us. The rancher also said the round chest hole was not there the day before.

SENASA would say it was the red-nosed mouse that came and ate it away?

Right. But the veterinarian and rancher said the first place that scavengers go for is the guts. They are not going to eat the muscles in the face and ear. The SENASA veterinarian at the press conference said about this issue, 'That's true with foxes. They can rip up the hide. But the mice, they are too small to dig into the cow hide, so they have to go through the orifices of the cows such as the mouth, ear, eye, rectum.

Which doesn't really explain a brand new hole in the chest from the day before, does it?

No, not really. But about what makes the round holes, one of the scientists in the press conference said, These mice tend to eat in that way. It's a natural biological phenomenon."

Dr. Pariani had never heard of the mice eating holes in cattle before this press conference?

No.

Uruguay Mutilations

What about Uruguay where last week a mutilated cow was found in the province of Durazno?

You know what they announced as the answer to Uruguay at the press conference? The Ranch Grazing Minister from there said it was 'the work of yellow jackets'!"

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