AN "ENDEMIC" OF ALLERGY TO PIGEON TICKS (Argas reflexus) AFTER REMOVAL OF DOVECOTES

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BACKGROUND
- Pigeon ticks: ectoparasites that feed on birds.
- If devoid of their natural host, they attack humans.
- While feeding, the ticks may cause allergy.

PROLOGUE
- Dovecotes were removed from attics of some houses.
- Afterwards, 9 resident of the houses experienced allergic problems.
- They associated their problems with appearance of some "bugs".
- Acarology examination: the "bug" is Argas reflexus.

QUESTION:
Was Argas reflexus (pigeon tick) the real culprit?

STUDY POPULATION
- 9 residents complaining of the "bug" allergy.
- 6 symptom-free residents of the same houses.

INVESTIGATION
- Questionnaire and medical examination.
- Skin prick tests and slgE-determination (UniCAP).
- Allergen: extracts of ticks collected on-site.

RESULTS
- In 2 of 9 symptomatic persons, causes other than ticks were identified.
- Results for remaining 7 patients and 6 controls are shown in the Table.

Table. Tick-related symptoms and allergy test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Symptomatic</th>
<th>Controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of persons</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin symptoms</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma and rhinitis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive SPT with Argas reflexus</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detectable slg against Argas reflexus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION
The differences between both groups support the causal role of Argas reflexus in the health complaints.

COMMENT
Pigeon ticks are capable of attacking and sensitising people.
This may happen if removal of dovecotes is not followed by proper eradication of the ticks.