



ISSN 1313 - 8820
Volume 6, Number 1
March 2014

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

2014

An International Journal Published by Faculty of Agriculture,
Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

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The journal is accepted to be indexed with the support of a project № BG051PO001-3.3.05-0001 "Science and business" financed by Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" of EU. The title has been suggested to be included in SCOPUS (Elsevier) and Electronic Journals Submission Form (Thomson Reuters).

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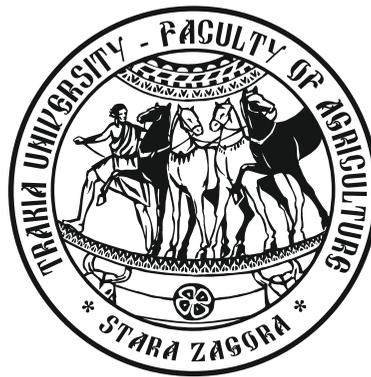
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ISSN 1313 - 8820

Volume 6, Number 1
March 2014



*AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*

2014

An International Journal Published by Faculty of Agriculture,
Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Histometrical parameters in third eyelid (Harderian) gland of the common pheasant (*Phasianus Colchicus Colchicus*)

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Abstract. Forty Harderian glands obtained from 20 clinically healthy and sexually mature common pheasants (10 birds of each gender) were investigated. Permanent histological preparations were made from previously fixed glands using routine histological techniques. Morphometric studies were performed by means of a light microscope with a built-in eyepiece micrometer. Data was statistically processed by a computer program (StatMost for Windows). The histometric analysis showed that the average size of pheasant Harderian gland lobules was 399.02 μm and 555.69 μm in female and male common pheasants, respectively. The average outer diameter of the acini was 39.64 μm in the female pheasants and 43.65 μm in the males. The average height of the covering glandular epithelium of the ducts was 18.67 μm in females and 21.41 μm in males. On the basis of our results, it could be concluded that the Harderian gland of the common pheasant by the time of the commercial realization presents a clear sexual dimorphism.

Keywords: Harderian gland, common pheasant, histometry

Introduction

All vertebrates – fish, amphibians, reptiles and mammals possess lachrymal gland, but in birds, the lachrymal gland and the third eyelid gland are the fundamental intraorbital glands and the Harderian gland is better developed and of greater size (McLelland, 1975; Popivanov et al., 1995). While all terrestrial vertebrate species possess a classic lachrymal gland, the Harderian gland was discovered and described only in some mammalian species. After the congress on bird anatomy held at Manchester (1976), the Harderian gland in the birds, is called third eyelid gland.

After the scientific report of Mueller et al. (1971), that both lachrymal and Harderian glands are a possible source of antibody-producing cells in chickens, the interest towards them has greatly increased. Since then, a number of studies have demonstrated that the glands contained immunocompetent cells (Burns, 1976; Burns et al., 1979; Aitken et al., 1987; Survache et al., 1998; Akaki et al., 2000; Khan et al., 2007). Despite the numerous evidence in different bird species, there is still no unanimous statement about the predominant role of either the lachrymal or Harderian gland for the local immunity within the eye orbit (Burns, 1996; Boydak et al., 2009; Bogdan, 2010; Kozlu et al., 2010; Bayraktaroglu et al., 2011). Today, the prevailing opinion is that the Harderian gland in birds is a lymphoepithelial organ providing almost entirely the local immunity of the eye orbit.

The phasianidae family includes about 150 species with different size and color forms, accustomed to and inhabiting almost all continents of the planet (Madge et al., 2002). According to Petkov et al. (2007), in Europe and the Republic of Bulgaria, the main subspecies with economic importance for hunting are the Caucasus pheasant, the Mongolian pheasant and the ring-necked pheasant. The common pheasant (*Phasianus Colchicus Colchicus*) is believed to be the only subspecies in Bulgaria living in the wild in Tundzha and Maritsa river valleys. The male bird attains 1 metre in length (half of this length is the tail) and weighs 1300–1500 g, whereas the female is smaller (850–1000 g).

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The scientific literature provides data about the anatomical, structural, ultrastructural and immunomorphological features of this gland especially in chickens, ducks and turkeys (Burns, 1996). Few authors only have investigated the Harderian gland in different avian species, bred by hybridization techniques for commercial purposes. A detailed study on pheasant's Harderian gland and its histometry is not available so far.

The scarce information on the subject and our long – standing interest on avian intraorbital glands (Dimitrov et al., 1987; Dimitrov 1997; 1999; 2001; 2005; 2009; Dimitrov et al., 2009; Dimitrov 2010; 2011; 2012), the weight and morphometric studies on intraorbital glands of common pheasant (Dimitrov 2012) were the incentive of the present study. It aimed to perform a light microscopy histometric analysis to determine the parameters of microstructural elements of the Harderian gland in common pheasant by the time of its commercial realization.

Material and methods

The study was carried out on biological material from 20 clinically healthy and sexually mature common pheasants (10 female and 10 male), purchased from the pheasant farm of the Elhovo Hunting Reserve. After transportation, pheasants were reared in conditions, appropriate for the species – in aviaries in groups of 10, ambient temperature 18–22°C, mixed lighting regimen and air humidity 55–60%. Feed and water were offered *ad libitum*.

In the beginning of the experiment, the individual live body weights of the birds were determined with automated balance ADAM AAA 100L with a precision of 0.1 mg. Biological material was obtained as per the requirements of the Ethical Animal Experimentation Committee at the Trakia University, Stara Zagora. After inhalation anaesthesia followed by decapitation, a pair of Harderian glands (right and left) were obtained from each bird by the method of Aitken et al. (1976). Before fixation, each gland was weighted and its metric parameters were determined. The 40th

Harderian glands were put in 10 % neutral formalin solution and in Bouin's and Karnoy's fixatives. Fixed specimens were processed by routine histological techniques. Single and serial paraffin sections (longitudinal and transverse) were cut on a Reichert microtome (Austria). After staining with haematoxylin (Ehrlich) and eosin, permanent histological preparations were obtained (Kiernan, 2008). All microstructural elements of the common pheasant Harderian glands were determined using a light microscope with built-in eyepiece micrometer (Carl Zeiss, Jena, Germany). Data were statistically processed by statistical software (StatMost for Windows) and presented in a table.

Results

The common pheasant Harderian gland situated deeply in ocular orbit, protected by bony orbit and ocular muscles, is covered by a thin connective tissue capsule. The histometric study showed that the average thickness of the capsule in all parts of the gland in the male common pheasants was thicker than the female birds with 3.60 μm (Table 1).

Along the surface of the gland, the capsule gave rise to connective tissue strands towards the inner part, thicker in their initial part, which divided the glandular parenchyma to lobules of different shape and size. The average thickness of interlobular septa of this lobular organ, in the male pheasants was thicker than the female with 2.44 μm (Table 1).

Using 10 X magnification, the histometrical investigation

showed 1.95 in male and 1.75 in female glandular lobules per microscope observation field, but the average size of glandular lobules of the male pheasants was bigger than this of the female with 156.66 μm (Table 1). In the common pheasant each lobule, regardless of its location, size or cut surface shape, possessed a very specific architectonics, which suggested that the organ was composed by numerous lobules of the same structure. The peripheral zone of each lobule was always occupied by densely located glandular acini. The investigation showed that the average outer diameter of the male glandular acini was bigger than the female with 4.01 μm because of which, under 10X magnification, the number of female acini was bigger than the male with 1.3 per microscope observation field (Table 1). Without being sharply delineated, a system of intricately branching tertiary, secondary and primary secretory glandular ducts was found to originate from each acinus in the lobule periphery. At magnification 20X, the average number of glandular ducts per one observation field was in the male 27 (tertiary), 19 (secondary), 12 (primary) and in the female 26, 22 and 14 respective. The results showed that from the periphery to the centre of each lobule, the number of ducts reduced almost twice. The number of secretory glandular ducts in the male pheasant was bigger only in the tertiary duct, but the number in the female, was bigger on the secondary and primary secretory ducts (Table 1). Contrary to the decreased number of glandular tubules, the average outer diameter of secretory ducts showed a moderate increase. The male pheasant showed only in the tertiary tubules bigger outer diameter from the female birds with 0.61 μm , while of the female secondary and primary secretory tubules, the outer diameter was

Table 1. Histometric parameters of the Harderian gland in common pheasant (*Phasianus Colchicus Colchicus*)

Parameters	Weight, number and sizes (Mean \pm SEM)	
	Female	Male
Body weight of the birds (g)	1.9996 \pm 0.0298	1.9996 \pm 0.0298
Thickness of gland's capsule (μm)	17.3333 \pm 0.4029	17.3333 \pm 0.4029
Thickness of interlobular septa (μm)	24.2760 \pm 0.3560	24.2760 \pm 0.3560
Number of lobules per microscopic observation field	1.9500 \pm 0.1995	1.9500 \pm 0.1995
Number of acini per microscopic observation field	29.5000 \pm 0.5416	29.5000 \pm 0.5416
Number of glandular ducts per microscopic observation field		
<i>tertiary tubules</i>	27.6000 \pm 0.8635	27.6000 \pm 0.8635
<i>secondary tubules</i>	19.6000 \pm 0.7235	19.6000 \pm 0.7235
<i>primary tubules</i>	12.1000 \pm 0.9355	12.1000 \pm 0.9355
<i>All ducts</i>	19.7666 \pm 0.1962	19.7666 \pm 0.1962
<i>Female and male ducts</i>	20.3833 \pm 0.0986	
Size of glandular lobules (μm)	555.6800 \pm 0.5600	555.6800 \pm 0.5600
Outer diameter of acini (μm)	43.6560 \pm 0.2350	43.6560 \pm 0.2350
Outer diameter of glandular ducts (μm)		
<i>tertiary tubules</i>	36.9240 \pm 0.7091	36.9240 \pm 0.7091
<i>secondary tubules</i>	38.1840 \pm 0.7991	38.1840 \pm 0.7991
<i>primary tubules</i>	49.9800 \pm 0.2724	49.9800 \pm 0.2724
<i>lobular duct</i>	307.1000 \pm 0.1873	307.1000 \pm 0.1873
<i>excretory duct of the gland</i>	403.0000 \pm 0.2190	403.0000 \pm 0.2190
Height of the glandular lining epithelium (m)		
<i>acini</i>	18.5960 \pm 0.1017	18.5960 \pm 0.1017
<i>tertiary tubules</i>	17.5440 \pm 0.1174	17.5440 \pm 0.1174
<i>secondary tubules</i>	18.9100 \pm 0.8482	18.9100 \pm 0.8482
<i>primary tubules</i>	19.5900 \pm 0.9062	19.5900 \pm 0.9062
<i>lobular duct</i>	26.1590 \pm 0.8443	26.1590 \pm 0.8443
<i>excretory duct of the gland</i>	27.6790 \pm 0.2268	27.6790 \pm 0.2268
<i>All ducts</i>	21.4130 \pm 0.1447	21.4130 \pm 0.1447
<i>Female and male ducts</i>	20.0420 \pm 0.1266	

bigger from the male with 3.15 μm and 7.27 μm respective.

All histological preparations showed lobules who exhibited glandular ducts of varying size, whose central part was occupied by the common collecting duct (lobular duct). The histometrical investigation showed that average outer diameter of the male lobular duct was bigger with 9.26 μm from the female. Although not all cuts were made across the duct passing through the gland and collecting the secretion of glandular lobules, we detected that average outer diameter of the female excretory glandular duct was bigger with 33.22 μm from the male (Table 1).

In all preparation, the lining and secretory glandular epithelia, covering the acini and all types of tubules, was actively functioning. The average epithelium height varied within a narrow range. The results showed that the epithelium height of the common pheasant Harderian gland increased by almost 5.35 μm in the female and with 9.08 μm in male, from acini towards the excretory glandular duct. In all the microstructural glandular elements, the height of the epithelia in the male common pheasant, dominated in comparison to the female with 0.96 μm (acini), 0.74 μm (tertiary tubules), 1.91 μm (secondary tubules), 3.61 μm (primary tubules), 4.53 μm (lobular duct), and 4.68 μm (excretory glandular duct) (Table 1).

Discussion

Burns (1996) investigated over 80 bird species in an attempt to determine the histological structure of Harderian gland, and he concluded for the presence of 4 main histological types in the birds, confirmed also by Shirama et al. (1996) and other researches. According to Burns (1996), and in a previous studies of ours Dimitrov et al. (1987), Dimitrov et al. (2009) and Dimitrov (2012), the pheasant Harderian gland was identified as a compound tubuloacinar gland.

There is no data in available research literature related to histometric measurements of Harderian gland in the common pheasant thus, a comparison could be only made to data obtained in Mongolian pheasant (Dimitrov, 2012). The Harderian gland of Mongolian pheasant is also a compound tubuloacinar gland, with a similar microarchitectonics pattern.

By the time of the commercial realization of the birds, the glandular lobules per microscopic observation field in Mongolian pheasant Harderian gland were more numerous (3.37) as compared to common pheasant (1.95). The difference (1.32) was due to the larger size of lobules in common pheasant (Table 1) vs the respective dimension in Mongolian pheasant (285.42 μm). A similar relationship was observed for the average number of acini per microscopic observation field – 18.70 in Mongolian pheasant and 29.50 in common pheasant, but it could be stated that the average outer diameter of Mongolian pheasant acini was with 2.58 μm (46.24 μm) larger than that of common pheasant acini (Table 1).

The comparison of histometric data between the pheasants Harderian glands showed differences in the dimensions of microstructural parameters, but similar patterns in glandular microarchitectonics. In the both pheasant hybrids, the number of secretory ducts (tertiary, secondary and primary) gradually decreased from the periphery to the centre of the lobule, in to parallel to increasing tubular diameters. The height of glandular and lining epithelium in the both hybrids was highest in acini, insignificantly reduced in secretory ducts, but increased again in the lobular and excretory ducts of the gland, indicating a most intensive secretory activity of acinar epithelium, but also a higher level of activity in glandular secretory ducts.

Conclusion

On the basis of our results, it could be concluded that the Harderian gland of the common pheasant present a clear sexual dimorphism in the microstructural histometrical parameters.

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Conclusion: The most important consequences for the science and practice resulting from the conducted research should be summarized in a few sentences. The conclusions shouldn't be numbered and no new paragraphs be used. Contributions are the core of conclusions.

References:

In the text, references should be cited as follows: single author: Sandberg (2002); two authors: Andersson and Georges (2004); more than two authors: Andersson et al. (2003). When several references are cited simultaneously, they should be ranked by chronological order e.g.: (Sandberg, 2002; Andersson et al., 2003; Andersson and Georges, 2004).

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Oldenbroek JK, 1999. Genebanks and the conservation of farm animal genetic resources, Second edition. DLO Institute for Animal Science and Health, Netherlands.

Book chapter or conference proceedings:

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Mauff G, Pulverer G, Operkuch W, Hummel K and Hidden C, 1995. C3-variants and diverse phenotypes of unconverted and converted C3. In: Provides of the Biological Fluids (ed. H. Peters), vol. 22, 143-165, Pergamon Press. Oxford, UK.

Todorov N and Mitev J, 1995. Effect of level of feeding during dry period, and body condition score on reproductive performance in dairy cows. IXth International Conference on Production Diseases in Farm Animals, Sept. 11 – 14, Berlin, Germany, p. 302 (Abstr.).

Thesis:

Penkov D, 2008. Estimation of metabolic energy and true digestibility of amino acids of some feeds in experiments with muscovy duck (*Carina moshata*, L). Thesis for DSc. Agrarian University, Plovdiv, 314 pp.

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Ethics

Studies performed on experimental animals should be carried out according to internationally recognized guidelines for animal welfare. That should be clearly described in the respective section "Material and methods".

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 6, Number 1
March 2014



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