

Pubic Lice from the Scalp Hair; a Report of Two Cases

That the pubic louse, *Pthirus pubis* (Linnaeus, 1758), may occur on sites other than the pubic hair (perianal, axillary, chest and body hair of hairy males, and even eyelashes and eyebrows) is well known. That it may also occur on the scalp is less well known. This note concerns two cases of such infestation, encountered within the space of 2 months, on the scalp hair of young white females. The cases were from different localities, and no connection could be established between the two.

Case No. 1: On 27 September 1972, a louse and several hairs bearing nits were brought by an area physician to the Syracuse County Laboratory for identification. They were reported as coming from the scalp of a 16-year-old girl. On determining that the species involved was *Pthirus pubis*, it was suggested that an error had been made in the notation of the site of origin, and the physician was called for verification. He definitely stated that the infestations involved the eyebrows and the scalp hair of the temporal regions. On reexamination, the hair with nits did resemble scalp hair rather than pubic hair. The girl in this case was said to be on the "wild" side and somewhat unkempt.

Case No. 2: On 20 November 1972, a 21-year-old student nurse was brought to my laboratory for confirmation of a case of pediculosis of the scalp. Numerous nits were present on the hairs of the occipital region, and a gravid female louse was removed for closer examination. Both nits and adult specimen were *Pthirus pubis*. A superficial inspection of the rest of the scalp showed no infestation. A search for more lice was not done out of consideration for the patient, who seemed to be of a refined type. However, the Student Health Service nurse stated that more lice were present and that they had first been observed by the girl's roommate. Neither Case No. 1 nor Case No. 2 admitted to infestation of the pubic area.

About a week later, a medical student, who identified himself as the boyfriend of Case No. 2, came to the Student Health Service for treatment of an infestation of the pubic region.

In this case there was no involvement of the scalp or other body areas. A possible origin for Case No. 1 was not established.

Unable to find reference to scalp infestation with pubic lice in the recent literature or textbooks, a number of professional entomologists were consulted through the courtesy of Dr. Donald Johnston of Ohio State University (pers. comm.). They stated that such infestation was either unknown or rare. Dr. K. C. Emerson, of the U. S. National Museum (pers. comm.), volunteered that he had recently seen a scalp infestation with *P. pubis* in a pre-school-age boy, which could be traced to common use of bedding with an infested adult. He regarded this case as unique.

Nuttall (1918, *Parasitology* 10: 383-405) refers to several earlier records of crab lice occurring in the scalp hair of infants and adults. He regarded such cases as extremely rare, particularly in adults. He also refers to two records of infestation in dogs. Frye (1968, *J. Am. Vet. Med. As.* 152: 1113) reported a male shepherd-type dog infested with crab lice, apparently acquired from its owner, who was also infested, since both dog and owner shared the same bed. In this case the number of lice on the dog suggested "a host-parasite relationship of some duration" rather than a casual stand, although no mention was made of nits on the dog, and the single female illustrated contained no egg.

Whether a colony of pubic lice can become established upon the scalp is uncertain. The fact that both the present cases involved multiple lice (according to the original observers), that abundant nits containing developing larvae were present, the fact that the single female removed by me contained a well-formed egg and had ingested a fresh blood meal, would suggest that these lice were reasonably well adjusted to their environment. Whether the fact that these three cases (mine and Emerson's) occurred in two females and one small child is of any significance is uncertain. In neither of my cases was the whole head involved. Whether this was due to limiting conditions of the habitat, or to the fact that insufficient time had elapsed for further colonization remains

unanswered. Nevertheless, if the crab louse can establish itself upon the dog, even temporarily, it would seem adaptable enough to accommodate to the human scalp. That two such cases were encountered within the space

of 2 months suggests that this type of infestation may be commoner than is realized.

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STUDY SECTION REPORT

SUMMARY STATEMENT (Privileged Communication)

Review Group: CMY (COSMOGRAPHY)
Application No: 1 R01 PG
001-01

Meeting Date: January 15, 1492

Investigator: COLON, CRISTOBAL
Position: UNEMPLOYED NAVIGATOR
Address: SEVILLE, SPAIN
Requested start date: 07/03/92

Project Title: AN ALTERNATE PASSAGE

Recommendation: DISAPPROVAL

Project Year	Direct Costs Requested
01	15,593
02	5,347

RÉSUMÉ: This application requests support for equipping and operating a small fleet of three vessels for a proposed westward voyage from Spain beyond the Azores to find a purported westward passage to India. The entire basis of the proposal rests on the ancient myth that the world is round rather than flat, and that to proceed westward for an unspecified distance will lead toward arriving at a place known to be eastward, a contradiction in logic.

Aside from the utterly untenable scientific premise, there can be no assurance that any alternate route to India would be any better than the present routes, which are well known to be as fast, as safe, and as direct as modern science and the configuration of the continents and oceans will permit.

DESCRIPTION: The applicant proposes to outfit three vessels and sail westward beyond the Azores to find an alternate route to India with the presumption that the world is round rather than flat, after the ancient Greek myth. Unstated in the proposal is the rationale for choosing a westward direction rather than a northward, northwestern, southwestern, southward, or other compass direction. The seemingly vital questions of how long the voyage will take, what distance will be attempted before turning back, how the return will be made if supplies are exhausted, or how the voyagers will attempt to save themselves if proxim-

ity to the edge of the world is reached, are also left to the imagination of the reviewers. The applicant also claims health relatedness by stating that if the project is successful, the increased amounts of Indian spices available will help alleviate the food spoilage problem and be of benefit to health.

CRITIQUE: This proposal is totally without merit. It is based on the applicant's apparently fixed but unsupported belief that the world is round rather than flat, in spite of all available evidence and the well-established works of the acknowledged authorities in cosmology and geography. Aside from this basic false premise, the proposal is otherwise so poorly planned as to be unacceptable. For instance, no rationale is presented for determining the distance westward to be travelled before turning back if the Western Sea is boundless, as has been postulated by some cosmographers; and no plans are given for the voyagers attempting to save themselves if proximity to the edge of the world is reached. These are important points in view of the required assurance for all scientific grants that the hazards to the investigator and assistants do not exceed normal voyage hazards.

The claim for health relatedness seems to have been included more to impress the reviewers than to accurately describe the intent of the investigator. No health benefit has ever been established for spice preserved foods. Indeed, this would seem to be a cultural and esthetic problem rather than one of health.

INVESTIGATOR, FACILITIES, AND BUDGET: The investigator is assumed to be reasonably competent in navigation, but his competence to plan and lead a scientific expedition must be held in serious question.

The facilities are perhaps adequate for the expedition but no rationale is presented as to the need for three ships rather than one, what scientific equipment, if any, would be used, and other important questions.

The budget appears to be excessive, and a well-planned expedition would be considerably more reasonable.