

## **Bobcat Parasite Deadly to Domestic Cats**

*SCWDS Briefs*, April 1996, 12.1

*Cytauxzoon felis* (proposed new name *Theileria felis*) is a protozoan blood parasite found in bobcats and other wild Felidae. Disease due to this parasite has not been reported in wild bobcats; however, it can readily cause fatal illness in domestic cats. Deaths in domestic cats due to *C. felis* were first reported in 1976 from southwest Missouri. Since then, sporadic cases also have been reported in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Sick domestic cats typically have acute depression, loss of appetite, dehydration, jaundice, anemia, and fever. *Cytauxzoon felis* organisms may be observed in the red blood cells on blood smears of sick domestic cats.

In a field survey of wild bobcats in Oklahoma, up to 62% of the animals examined by blood smears were infected. Laboratory studies have revealed that bobcats occasionally die when experimentally infected with the parasite; however, the majority of inoculated bobcats survive with no signs of illness. The American dog tick, *Dermacentor variabilis*, has been shown experimentally to be a vector, although other vectors are possible.

There is no effective treatment known for cytauxzoonosis in domestic cats; once they become infected, the prognosis is poor. The only solution is for owners to protect their pet cats from exposure to ticks. There is no known human health risk associated with *C. felis*.

...continued