Prevalence of *Toxoplasma gondii* in Belgian wildlife

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*Toxoplasma gondii*, an obligate intracellular protozoan parasite, has a worldwide high prevalence in most warm-blooded animals and humans. Few studies are available on the occurrence of this parasite in wild animals. In this study we investigated the prevalence of *T. gondii* in Belgian wildlife. We tested brain samples from red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), European polecats (*Mustela putorius*), European pine martens (*Martes martes*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*) and roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*). The samples were tested by Real Time PCR for the presence of *T. gondii* brain cysts. The amplified DNA target was the 529 bp *T. gondii* ‘repeat element’ (AF146527). To check for inhibition, the cellular r18S gene was used. The prevalence was found to be: red fox: 57/304; European polecat: 2/2; European pine marten: 1/2; raccoon: 0/2; brown rat 19/335; muskrat 2/10 and roe deer 1/33. Twenty-six of the *T. gondii* positive DNA samples from foxes were genotyped: 25 were type II and one type III. In addition, 73 roe deer serum samples were tested by SAG1 ELISA for the presence of anti-*T. gondii* antibodies, 38 (52%) were positive.