

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

22nd October 1991

Dear Sir,

An Unusual Foreign Body in the Eye

A 13 year old British boy presented at the Awali Hospital recently with a history of having suddenly felt something in his right eye whilst walking home from school in Awali three days previously. The predominant symptom was irritation but the father made the important comment that his son had felt something moving about beneath the lids.

On examination there was mild increased redness of the conjunctivae and at first nothing else to find. Fluorescein perfusion showed no corneal damage. Whilst the eye was being re-examined under magnification which included illumination, a tiny body was suddenly seen to move across the cornea. This was removed with a cotton wool swab-on-stick and examined immediately microscopically as a saline-wet preparation. No diagnosis was forthcoming as to the identification of the small larva seen with impressive curved "hooks" which protruded laterally from its head. The specimen was sent to London on the same slide, sealed with carbowax.

Further examination of the eye produced another larva which was removed, after which the young patient felt the irritation had gone. His eye was irrigated and he was discharged to take Betnesol-N eye drops 3-4 hourly for a day.

The London report showed the organism to be a first larval instar of *Oestrus ovis* L (sheep nostril fly or sheep bot fly). The larva was described as being white and oval and rather flat and about 0.5 mm long. The mouth-hooks were strong, sharply-pointed and horn-like and the cephalo-pharyngeal skeleton was long. The head segment had a crown of several rows of minute yellow hooks that surrounded the anterior end.

The first instar larvae of the sheep nostril fly are squirted in flight at the nostrils of sheep (also goats and dogs) where they attach themselves to the mucous membrane of the frontal sinuses. Occasionally, as in this case, larvae may be deposited in the eye, mouth, nostril or outer ear of man. Fortunately, these larvae do not survive beyond the first instar but may live for as long as ten days. As many as 50 larvae have been removed from the conjunctival sac of a single patient. Although the larvae are tiny, transparent and easily overlooked, in these cases the sclerotised mouth parts are readily identifiable even on rough slides.

There is no doubt that the comments by the father that his son had felt something moving about beneath the eye lids stimulated an even more careful search for a body that was easy to miss.

Yours sincerely,

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(Comments on similar cases are invited)