COCCIDIA - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The first observation on the oocyst of the coccidia was made by Leeuwenhoek (1674) in the bile of rabbits. However, it was only after 150 years that the first description was available. This was described by Hoke (1839) as globules of pus associated with a diseased liver. Later workers recognised these as distinct organisms but gave different names like Psorospermium - Muller, 1841, Monocystis - Lindemann, 1865; Gregarina - Eimer, 1870; Eimeria - Schneider, 1875 and Coccidium Leuckart, 1879.

Remak (1845) first suggested that the oocysts in the bile of rabbits were similar to the organism described by Muller (1841) as Psorospermium from a fish. Lindemann (1865) thought that the oocysts were gregarines. Leuckart (1879) first recognised them as independent forms and gave the generic name Coccidium. Meanwhile Eimer (1871) described the endogenous stages of a coccidian in a mouse. He thought that it was a gregarine and called it Gregarina falciformis. In 1875 Schneider recognised the independent identity of this organism and erected the generic name Eimeria. Since then this genus has been widely recognised and several species described.
The first review of the different coccidia described till then was made by Minchin (1903). He recognised the importance of the number of sporocysts per oocyst as a diagnostic character. This was elaborated by Hoare (1933), who recognised the importance of the number of sporozoites per sporocyst, besides the number of sporocysts per oocyst. Based on these characters, he prepared a table for the identification of the coccidian genera. After extensive studies he revised the table in 1957 and this still remains as one of the most convenient basis for identification of the different genera of coccidia.

The other major contributions on coccidia during the last fifty years are those of Becker (1934), Grasse (1952), Orlov (1956), Davies, Joyner and Kendall (1963), Pellerdy (1965, 1974), Cheissin (1967), Levine and Ivens (1965), (1970) and Hammond and Long (1973). The various contributions from India have been summarised in the comprehensive review by Mandal (1975-1976).