P R E F A C E

The coccidia have been one of the major groups of protozoa that have attracted attention in view of their importance. Ever since the first species was described in 1870, there has been a progressively increasing realization of their importance. The discovery of several species causing extensive pathological damage and mortality in poultry, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and several other animals have increased their importance.

In recent years, extensive studies on the ultra structure of coccidia and the discovery of the close relationship of the coccidia with *Toxoplasma* has made this group one of a great biological, medical as well as veterinary importance.

There have been several contributions on the coccidia from different parts of the world. In recent times, there is a great flood of publications, particularly on the *Toxoplasma* and related organisms. However, a major part of these contributions have come from a few centres of research in the advanced countries, which have the advantages of modern
techniques and sophisticated instrumentation. In several other areas even basic information on the systematics and prevalence of coccidia is not available.

In India, studies on coccidiosis have been relatively scanty. Mandal (1975) in a review on "fifty years progress in the taxonomy of coccidia (Protozoa: Sporozoa) from India", estimated that about two hundred species of coccidia spread over seventeen genera were described till then. This information is thus very negligible considering the very large size of our country and the endless variety of animals that constitute its fauna. The necessity for basic taxonomic studies is also reflected in the statement of Levine (1973) that "Eimeria had been described only from 1.2% of the world's chordates and 5.7% of the world's mammals". He also estimated that if all chordates were examined perhaps at least 34,000 species of Eimeria might be found and that 3,500 of them would be from mammals. Most of the contributions on the coccidia of mammals have come from the veterinary laboratories at Bombay, Mathura, Calcutta and Izatnagar. Only in recent years attempts have been made at comprehensive studies
on the prevalence and systematics of the mammalian coccidia of India. In the past ten years, more and more workers have taken to coccidia and several useful contributions have been made on the fauna of the different regions. Studies in this direction were initiated in the protozoology laboratory of the Department of Zoology, Marathwada University, about fifteen years ago. During this period three major contributions have been made on the coccidial fauna of the Marathwada region. The first covered the systematics of the avian coccidia. The second dealt with the prevalence and systematics of the coccidia in goats of Parbhani district, besides a taxonomic survey of the coccidia of rats and squirrels. The third contribution made an extensive analysis of the prevalence and systematics of the coccidia of sheep and pigs of this region.

The present contribution is the fourth in this series and covers a comparative study of the coccidia of goats and sheep in the Aurangabad district, besides a taxonomical account of the coccidia of rabbits in this area.