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Detection of *Leishmania infantum* DNA in phlebotomine sand flies from an area where canine leishmaniosis is endemic in southern Italy

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Abstract

Phlebotomine sand flies (Diptera, Psychodidae) are vectors of *Leishmania* spp., among which *Leishmania infantum* is recognized as the main agent of human and canine leishmaniosis (CanL) in the Mediterranean area. In this study, females of *Phlebotomus* spp. (*P. perniciosus*, *P. neglectus* and *P. papatasi*) and *Sergentomyia minuta* were collected in a dog shelter of southern Italy, where CanL is endemic, and examined for *Leishmania* DNA. In total, 32 out of 56 of *Phlebotomus* spp. insects (57.1%) were found positive for *L. infantum* DNA by quantitative PCR (qPCR), with a mean parasite load of 1.9×10^3 promastigotes/ml among 23 positive *P. perniciosus* and 2.1×10^3 promastigotes/ml

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