The Hollow Tree

Science: *Soon after the outbreak was identified as Ebola in March 2014, wildlife epidemiologist Fabian Leendertz of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin went to southeastern Guinea to look for signs of an outbreak in wildlife. Leendertz, with three more German veterinarians spent 4 weeks in the region, capturing bats from four sites and surveying two protected forest areas.*

On Mar 28, more than 3 months after the child's death.

The researchers found ***no evidence that wild animals were dying*** *of Ebola, they report in a paper published online today in EMBO Molecular Medicine. The populations of chimpanzees, duikers, and other large mammals were at about the same levels they had been in the previous surveys in the region. They also found no direct evidence of Ebola virus infections in any of the 169 bats (from at least 13 species) that they captured and tested.*

No evidence of any animal infection. No evidence of bats hosting the disease. Not that that's ever stopped a zoonotic scientist before. Or *later* should i say ...

But their visit to Meliandou (Jan 28) yielded intriguing clues.

(The) researchers learned of (a) tree and linked it to one of the outbreak's first victims. But, in a frustrating twist, the tree had burned to a stump just before they arrived, ***thwarting their search for evidence*** *that might confirm the scenario.*

So convenient. Reminiscent of the Wuhan wetmarket being disinfected - which supposedly thwarted the zoonatis' efforts to prove Covid was natural. Note: when *Science* says the *outbreak's first victims*, they mean *suspected*. No-one from the village was definitively confirmed - they were all long dead and buried by the time Leendertz got there. Yes, they reportedly had symptoms of fever and diarrhea, but other illnesses in Africa have those symptoms, including cholera, malaria, typhoid, and Lassa fever. As Garry notes: *Lassa cases come in all the time. .. (It's) very similar to Ebola in the way patients present their symptoms .. you can't tell them apart from the symptoms or anything. Even a very experienced clinician cannot tell the difference between Ebola virus and Lassa virus.*

Science: *The hollow tree was only 50 meters from the house where the toddler lived; children used to play in it, residents told the researchers. But on 24 March, the tree had burned, Leendertz says—and all that was left were the stump, fallen branches, and ashes.*

Leendertz: There are different stories about why it burned.

Science declines to report what those stories were.

When the tree started burning, there was a "rain of bats," villagers told Leendertz—a small, smelly species with a long tail locally called lolibelo and sometimes "mice that can fly." In the ash surrounding the tree, the researchers found DNA fragments that match the Angolan free-tailed bat Mops condylurus, an insect-eating species .. that fits the villagers' description.

A hollow-tree with a lot of bats roosting in it. Not unusual. The theory was that the toddler was playing in the hollow tree and got infected. But:

... they found no infected bats in their samples (from dead ones collected around the tree).

Leendertz: *The virus must be extremely rare in bat populations,. Because bats are hunted so much, if the Ebola virus were widespread, we'd see infections all the time.*

Good point.

Andersen/Holmes/Rambaut agree: *a **single spill-over infection** seems the more likely*.

So there's no evidence of a bat virus but it's *believed* by Andersen-Holmes-Rambaut to have been a bat. Let's call it the Lone Bat Theory:

*This finding suggests that EBOV Makona may be fairly new to West Africa, sharing recent common ancestry with Middle African variants that are found **thousands of miles away.***

Molecular clock dating analyses have also shown that all recorded human EVD outbreaks caused by EBOV appear to share a common ancestor around 1975.

*Notably, this is around the time of the first described EVD outbreak in 1976, suggesting that the EBOV lineage experienced a **severe genetic bottleneck** before the first human outbreak.*

Sure did - it had bottled up the entirety of human history in fact. Was Ebola a prelude to the Covid scenario? Was it also a case of scientists taking harmless viruses from nature - souping them up in lab animals - especially monkeys, bats, rats - then one of them gets loose - infects a lab worker - an accidental needle prick?

Garry: *In the laboratory environment, that's **a more controlled environment.** .. But there's **always a chance that a mistake is made**. And so I think you have probably read that the Canadians have pulled some of the people back from Sierra Leone already just today or yesterday. And so, yeah, these are considerations. This is **high-risk** work.*

Meanwhile back in the time-machine: Wonder what was happening in the 1970's? Garry reveals that:

*In fact, there's been a research program on the Lassa fever since the 1970s set up by the (U.**S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**) and **other groups**.*

We can assume it was biodefense related - the *other groups* being military.

Apart from that, the Vietnam War was being lost while the Cold War was still in full swing. Proactive bio-weapons inventing was running rampant until 1969, the year of the first Lassa outbreak in Nigeria, when Nixon banned it following a review of the program.

Nixon: *There had been no such review in **over 15 years**. As a result, objectives and policies in this field were unclear and programs lacked definition and direction.*

In other words: secret bioweapons research had become a world unto itself since the post WW2 era.

As with Obama's moratorium on GoF research in 2014, which was triggered by a slew of accidents, was Nixon's review prompted by a lab-mishap? Or did he simply realize the potential of bioweapons to undermine America's dominance in traditional military firepower? Not much good having nuclear missiles if all the enemy has to do is release a virus. He avowed the US would never employ bio-technology as a weapon - stockpiles of bioweapons were destroyed - agreements were negotiated with Russia to do the same. Military scientists were limited to bio-weapons defense research thereafter.

Given bioweapon research cohorts had operated for so long as their own unaccountable kingdom, did Nixon's ban put some powerful noses out of joint in the world of scio-security?

But I'm diverging. Back to the Lone Bat Theory:

- a lone bat from Zaire flew *thousands of miles* to the hollow tree in the village of Meliandou - then
- evolved the 3% needed - in a genetic pool of one - to make it an identical match - then
- infected the toddler - and nobody else
- with no evidence of any bat carrying the virus

The permutations and combinations are starting to mount. As with RatG13 or the Laos bats - both close to 97% similarity - some astonishing evolutionary leaps must have taken place in a minuscule timeframe in order for this bat to effect Andersen et al's *single spillover infection* ...

Or: the Zaire strain was held at a lab in the vicinity, and the changes were done there.

As Garry would later say about the evolutionary contortions you would need for Covid to be natural - *I just can't figure out how this gets accomplished in nature – its stunning. Of course, in the lab it would be easy.*

To summarize, 12 unconfirmed cases along a *not well established* epidemiological trail, is a burned out tree that *thwarted* the search for evidence - and a *belief* that it came from bats - with no other evidence of animal infection.

In this tree, a single bat spawned a version of a 40 year-old virus from 1000's of miles away then infected a lone toddler in a remote village - and no-one else. Then disappeared from animal populations.

Peter Walsh, Cambridge, Ebola specialist: *It (the hollow tree) is suggestive, but it* ***certainly doesn't rise to a 'smoking gun' level.***

So why on earth are Andersen, Holmes, Rambaut saying *the origin seems well resolved*?

Thanks to this cohort of scientists, the narrative became well established. They repeated, unquestioningly, the speculations of others - which were later repeated by other researchers - who fed it to the media. Who printed it as science gospel - to the exclusion of all else.

Notice any similarities?

Whereas Covid became a pandemic killing millions, turning the world upside-down - thus inspiring a small army of internet sleuths to re-examine the official narrative - the Ebola outbreak, the biggest in history, remained largely confined to three African countries.

As a result, Ebola's equally dubious origin story went mostly unchallenged. Not to say there weren't researchers questioning it. Nana's book explores the merits/discrepancies of several investigators who did raise concerns, poses the question Why? But they were small enough to be brushed aside by the powerful science community/media elites. No official investigation has ever been held into the possibility of a lab-event.

And so yet another spurious origin story gets passed into science zoonosis lore - without any substantial proof - or rigorous examination.

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