Author's response to reviews

Title: Large serological survey showing cocirculation of Ebola and Marburg viruses in Gabonese bat populations, and a high seroprevalence of both viruses in Rousettus aegyptiacus

Authors:

Xavier Pourrut (xavier.pourrut@ird.fr)
Marc Souris (fnmsr@diamond.mahidol.ac.th)
Jonathan S Towner (jit8@cdc.gov)
Pierre E Rollin (pyr3@cdc.gov)
Stuart T Nichol (stn1@CDC.GOV)
Jean-Paul Gonzalez (Jean-paul.gonzalez@ird.fr)
Eric Leroy (eric.leroy@ird.fr)

Version: 6 Date: 1 July 2009

Author's response to reviews: see over
Author's response to the reviewers

Title: Large serological survey showing cocirculation of Ebola and Marburg viruses in Gabonese bat populations, and a high seroprevalence of both viruses in Rousettus aegyptiacus

Authors:
Xavier Pourrut (xavier.pourrut@ird.fr)
Marc Souris (fnmsr@diamond.mahidol.ac.th)
Jonathan S Towner (jit8@cdc.gov)
Pierre E Rollin (pyr3@cdc.gov)
Stuart T Nichol (stn1@CDC.GOV)
Jean-Paul Gonzalez (Jean-paul.gonzalez@ird.fr)
Eric Leroy (eric.leroy@ird.fr)

Version: 3

Date: 1 July 2009

Author's response to reviewers: see below
Manuscript MS: 3147926952587346

Please find enclosed a revised version of our manuscript #3147926952587346. Answers to reviewer 1’s specific comments are provided below. Reviewer 2 considers that the article is now acceptable without further corrections.

Reviewer 1

1. Still a lot of editing to do. For example, BEBOV is not italicized in the first paragraph of the Background, problem with periods at the bottom of P4, "Odzlala" national park on P5, etc.

These errors have been corrected.

2. Need to define the %s that are presented at the bottom of P8 ... what are they? Ideally, abundances in terms of individuals per net hour would be presented, so that we can have ideas of relative abundances of each species at each site.

The % values are now explained.

3. Is a correction for multiple comparisons necessary for the 3rd paragraph of the Results? Perhaps so.

The errors have been corrected.
4. I insist that the sequence data MUST BE PRESENTED. The authors say that they added these data to the Discussion (not sure why there!), but I cannot find any substantial mention there. The sequence data are IMPORTANT, and should be an integral part of this manuscript. They need to be presented in the RESULTS, along with sequence-level comparisons with reference sequences (i.e., percent sequence divergences, etc.), and they MUST be deposited in GenBank!

All the sequence data have been already published (Nature, 2005; PLoS ONE, 2007), deposited in Genbank and directly accessible (MARV EU068108-13; ZEBOV DQ205409–DQ205415). It will be not fair for both the readers and the previous editors to restate such information available at will. Comments on these data have been added to the discussion.

5. I think that the authors need to be clear about what happened regarding identification of the microchiroptera. My interpretation of what information they have provided is that they did not preserve voucher specimens (although it is EASY to inject them with formol and dump into a bucket!), and that they did not have sufficient expertise with them in the field to identify the species involved. This situation is not acceptable ... it is simply not true that the only way to ID them is via genetic analyses ... most of the species involved can be ID'd EASILY by a specialist. If vouchers are preserved, this is a non-issue, and the material then results in a permanent contribution to African mammalogy, as well as attesting to the actual IDs of the hosts examined. SARS. Had all mammal specimens in subsequent studies been ID'd just to suborder (as in this ms), WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED when they realized that civets were just a red herring, and that the real host was Rhinolophus bats??????? Lack of vouchering, and consequent lack of proper IDs, is simply unconscionable in a study of this importance.
OK, so I am recommending publication of this paper anyway, because I think that the information that is presented is useful and important. I do think that the authors should be more forthright about what they did and did not do in this regard: "Microchiroptera were not identified to species for lack of expertise with their identification in the field and for lack of preservation of voucher specimens." If the authors are interested in vouchering their future material post-acceptance of this paper, I am perfectly comfortable with my identity being revealed to them, to provide counsel and support (if desired) on this issue. It is an important issue.

As recommended, we have removed the Microchiroptera data from the results, explaining why we did so (in view of the reviewer’s comments).