



Rinderpest: An historical overview

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ABSTRACT

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Rinderpest is one of the few diseases which have changed the course of world history. Originally an Asian disease, for centuries it had a devastating impact in Europe when introduced by returning and marauding armies accompanied by cattle as well as by cattle trade. Nowhere was its impact more dramatically expressed than in Africa where the sequel to its introduction into the Horn of Africa was a devastating panzootic throughout sub-Saharan Africa during the last decade of the 19th century extending into the 20th century. Massive deaths of livestock, wild animals and the people dependent on them led to widespread human misery and changed the face of the African continent forever.

Into the middle of the 20th century the story in Africa and Asia was one of repeated epizootics against a background of enzootic disease affecting both livestock and wildlife. Colonial Veterinary Services were engrossed in rinderpest control and the resources needed for its control were often overwhelmed. Yet, internationally-coordinated rinderpest programmes, of which the last is the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme, have led to a point where there is growing confidence that the disease and rinderpest infection in the wild have been eradicated, having last been detected in Pakistan in 2000 and Kenya and Sudan in 2001.
