Bird-feeding ticks transstadially transmit Borrelia burgdorferi that infect Syrian hamsters

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Bird-feeding Ixodes dammini ticks were documented for the first time to successfully molt and transstadially pass Borrelia burgdorferi spirochetes that were indistinguishable by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis from the type B31 strain. Forty-six of 73 blood-engorged larvae and 50 of 66 fully-fed nymphs, removed from wild-caught birds, successfully molted. Borreliae were isolated from 21 of 78 partially- and fully-fed larvae off birds, including six specimens that molted. Spirochete-positive cultures also were obtained from 35 of 60 partially- and fully-fed nymphs that When the tick feeds, the Borrelia downregulates OspA and upregulates OspC, another surface protein. After the bacteria migrate from the midgut to the salivary glands, OspC binds to Salp15, a tick salivary protein that appears to have immunosuppressive effects that enhance infection. Successful infection of the mammalian host depends on bacterial expression of OspC. Tick bites often go unnoticed because of the small size of the tick in its nymphal stage, as well as tick secretions that prevent the host from feeling any itch or pain from the bite. "Ability of Ixodes persulcatus, Haemaphysalis concinna and Dermacentor silvarum ticks to acquire and transstadially transmit Borrelia garinii". Experimental & Applied Acarology.