

IDENTIFICATION OF *SARCOCYSTIS COLUMBAE* IN WOOD PIGEONS (*COLUMBA PALUMBUS*) IN LITHUANIA

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Summary. Cysts of *Sarcocystis* were found in two out of 18 wood pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) hunted in Lithuania in 2008 and 2009. Morphologically investigated *Sarcocystis* sp. had type-1 tissue cyst wall and was not distinguishable from *S. calchasi*, *S. columbae* and *S. wobeseri*, parasitizing in birds. According to the DNA analysis, *Sarcocystis* sp. from the wood pigeon was identified as *S. columbae*. On the basis of 18S rRNA and 28S rRNA gene sequences *S. columbae* is phylogenetically most closely related to *Sarcocystis* spp. from birds. According to the phylogenetic and ecologic data, predatory birds are expected to be definitive hosts of *S. columbae*. This is the first report of *Sarcocystis* in birds of the Columbidae family in Lithuania.

Keywords: *Sarcocystis*, identification, phylogeny, wood pigeons, Lithuania.