Serendipity: My Ally in Coccidiosis Research
Thomas K. Jeffers
Courtesy Professor, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

A Seminar at the University of Guelph, October 18, 2013.

Abstract:

Serendipity is a term coined in 1754 to describe accidental discoveries, well known examples being Newton’s falling apple and the law of gravitation; Jenner’s discovery of a method to vaccinate against smallpox; and Fleming’s discovery of penicillin.

Those who have reaped the benefits of serendipity in research have possessed strong powers of observation in order to recognize good fortune when it comes their way. Such a keen power of observation must have been possessed by E.E. Tyzzer, the man many consider “the father” of coccidiosis research. From his small poultry flocks, he was the first to isolate and describe five new species of coccidia of the domestic fowl, as well as three new species of coccidia of turkeys.

In my own career in coccidiosis research, there are three examples of serendipity being an important ally:

- Collateral sensitivity to anticoccidial drugs and synergism
- Attenuation of coccidia for use in vaccines
- Drug combinations and potentiation of ionophores

I will discuss each of these examples in my seminar.

When I now look back at my 50 years of coccidiosis research, I’m convinced that one must let his or her curiosity lead where it may. Accordingly, an observant scientist should remain alert and on the lookout for surprises, because serendipity may well be an important ally.