



Implementation of Cardiac Troponin I as A Sensitive Biomarker for Myocardial Injury in Animals: Review Article

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ABSTRACT

A biomarker is defined as a detectable biomarker of a specific state and is often measured in urine, blood, milk, sweat, tear or soft tissue, either in physiological or pathological conditions. Of these commonly used biomarkers specifically for heart injury, there are cardiac troponin I (cTnI) and N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide. The cardiac troponin I is a sensitive biomarker formed by the injured cardiac cells and hence is used in humans for the early discovery of cardiac injury, and in parallel, it is used for prognostic purposes. Veterinary medicine widely uses cTnI as a marker for myocardial injury. In equines, cTnI was found to be a useful marker for the diagnosis of either primary or secondary myocardial injuries. It has also been used in newborn dogs to predict hypoxia and cardiac injury as a result of perinatal asphyxia. In neonatal calves with congenital heart anomalies, it was reported that the affected animals had a higher concentration of cTnI. In lambs with myocarditis, it was reported that significant levels of serum cTnI were detectable in diseased cases compared to healthy ones. This review article was written to emphasize the clinical significance of cTnI as a sensitive biomarker for cardiac injury in animals either in physiological or pathologic states. It has been concluded from several pathological and physiological studies that cTnI is a highly specific cardiac biomarker. It can detect myocardial injury due to primary cardiac disorders such as pericarditis, endocarditis and myocarditis. Also, it can predict cardiac injury in some non-cardiac-affected cases that can affect the heart, such as racing competitions, long road transportation, extensive training, difficult parturition, Downer syndrome, general anesthesia, infestation with external parasites such as ticks, calcium injection in extremely high doses, injection of cardiac glycosides, and use of the electroejaculation method to collect semen.

Keywords: Animals, Biomarkers, Cardiac Troponin I, Myocardial injury, Pathophysiology.

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INTRODUCTION

In the medical sciences, a biomarker is defined as a detectable marker for a specific condition and is often evaluated in urine, blood, milk, sweat, tear or soft tissue, either in physiological or pathological circumstances (Jesuthasan *et al.*, 2022; Tharwat, 2023). Of these markers, cardiac-derived biomarkers are currently used on a large scale in veterinary practice; the two most commonly used markers are cardiac

troponin I (cTnI) and N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide (Oyama, 2013).

The cTnI is a sensitive biomarker used in human medicine to predict myocardial injury. It is formed by the injured myocytes and therefore is currently used in human medicine for the early detection of cardiac damage and, at the same time, for the prognosis of the affected cases (La Vecchia *et al.*, 2000;

Koureti, 2022). It was reported that in human patients with myocardial infarction, the blood level of cTnI is increased not only after the occurrence of the disease but elevated due to various pathologies affecting the myocardium (**Katrukha and Katrukha, 2021**). During the pandemic of COVID-19, the levels of cTnI have been extensively used in ten of the studies to predict the prognosis of the patients (**Al Abbasi et al., 2020; Lippi et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2020; Salvatici et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021**).

In animals, the use of cTnI as a biomarker for heart injury is broadly applied (**Tharwat, 2020; Tharwat, 2023**). In horses, it was found that cTnI is a useful biomarker for the diagnosis of either primary or secondary myocardial injury cases compared to healthy horses (**Van Der Vekens et al., 2015**). The biomarker has also been used in dogs to predict hypoxia and cardiac injury as a result of perinatal asphyxia in newborn dogs. It was concluded in the latter study that serum cTnI was higher in asphyxiated cases compared to non-asphyxiated neonatal dogs and therefore may be used as a sensitive biomarker of ischemic cardiac injury in neonatal dogs (**Nobre Pacífico Pereira et al., 2022**).

In calves with congenital heart anomalies, it was reported that the diseased calves had a higher serum concentration of cTnI (**Suzuki et al., 2012**). In lambs with myocarditis, a significant increase in serum cTnI was measured and reported in diseased versus healthy lambs (**Karapinar et al., 2012**). More recently, it was reported that with the development of embryos, the level of cTnI decreased towards parturition in sheep (**Jonker and Louey, 2024**).

The uses of cTnI in veterinary medicine were found to be highly applicable in both diseased and sound animals for the evaluation of the myocardium's functional status. This review article was therefore designed to emphasize the importance of cTnI as a sensible biomarker for cardiac injury in animals, either in physiological or pathologic states.

Cardiac troponin I and physiological conditions

A report conducted on healthy racing greyhounds with a 7-kilometer competition race showed that serum cTnI concentration increased in 97% of the dogs with a highly significant difference when compared to pre-racing concentration, then declined a day after the competition ended. However, the factors behind such increases in healthy greyhounds are not strictly identified, and therefore the detected high levels were attributed to racing (**Fig. 1**) (**Tharwat et al., 2013b**).

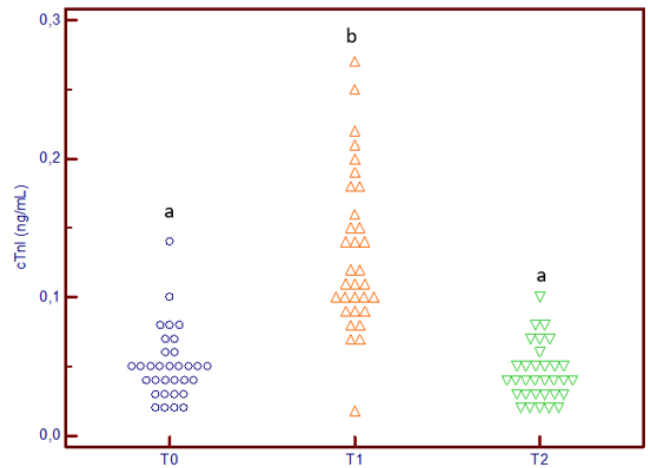


Fig. 1. Comparison of serum cardiac troponin I levels in 32 racing greyhounds' pre-race (T0), 2 hours post-race (T1) and 24 hours post-race (T2) (Tharwat et al., 2013b). ^{a,b} Different letters indicate statistical significance (P < 0.05).

The high cTnI concentrations were detected in healthy sled dogs who participated in exercise of different intensities (**McKenzie et al., 2007**). In another study carried out on healthy racing camels, the level of cTnI was also significantly raised in 91.3% of the animals after a competition of 5 km but dropped a day post-race to pre-race concentrations (**Fig. 2**) (**Tharwat et al., 2013d**).

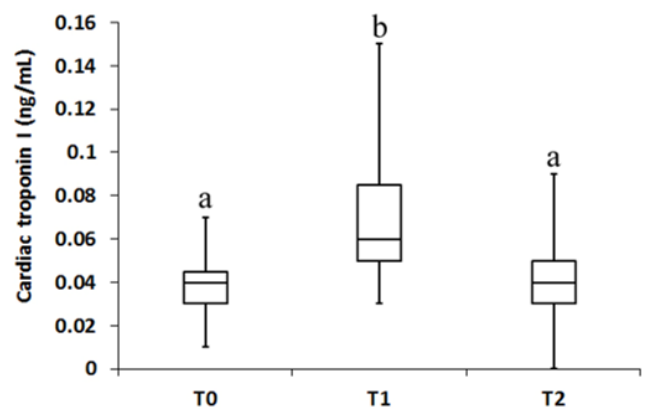


Fig. 2. Alterations of cardiac troponin I values in camels before (T0), 2 h after (T1) and 24 h after (T2) a 5 km race (Tharwat et al., 2013d). ^{a,b} Different letters indicate statistical significance (P < 0.05).

Nostell and Haggström (2008) suggested that the increases in cTnI in horses may be due to the hypoxia that accompanied exercise, resulting in a change in myocardial permeability and finally leakage of cTnI into the bloodstream. The decline in cTnI after racing suggested that the myocardial injury in racing competitions was reversible and therefore should be

explained in future studies as an adaptation for the race. Interestingly, the level of cTnI did not show any significant changes after 8 km of training in healthy racing camels versus base line levels (Tharwat, 2021). The latter findings support the theory that cTnI is released only during intense exercise or racing competitions as a result of cardiac hypoxia, as reported by Nostell and Haggström (2008).

In 25 healthy camels transported for a round trip of 500 km that took approximately 5 hours, the serum level of cTnI increased significantly 2 hours post-loading compared to pre-loading concentrations; the levels returned to pre-experiment values 24 hours later (Fig. 3) (Tharwat et al., 2013c). The reason why cTnI elevated significantly after transportation is not clear. However, because the transported camels were healthy, cTnI release may be due to stress during transportation.

It is also evident that this process is reversible, as the cTnI level returned to its baseline concentration within 24 hours of the end of transportation. On the contrary, no significant differences were detected in 10 horses subjected to a 300-kilometer round-trip journey that took about 3.5 hours (Fig. 4) (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014c). Why the level of cTnI did not increase significantly as camels did may be explained on the basis of the method of transportation applied in both trials. In the camel experiment, animals were transported for 500 km, or about 5 hours, loaded in a recumbent in an open truck, and loaded and unloaded by a winch; therefore, this method is stressful. On the other hand, horses were transported for 300 km, or about 3 hours, standing throughout the experiment, loaded in a closed truck, and the climatic conditions were optimal; that is why cTnI did not differ significantly.

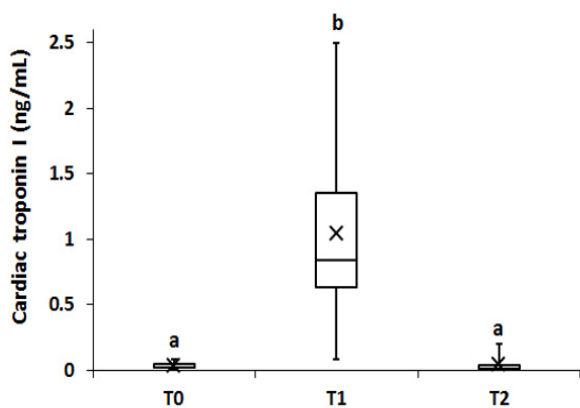


Fig. 3. Box and whiskers plot of cardiac troponin I and effect in camels transported for a round trip of 500 km; before (T0), within 2 hours of the end of transport (T1) and 24 hours after transportation (T2). (Tharwat et al., 2013c). ^{a,b} Different letters indicate statistical significance ($P < 0.001$).

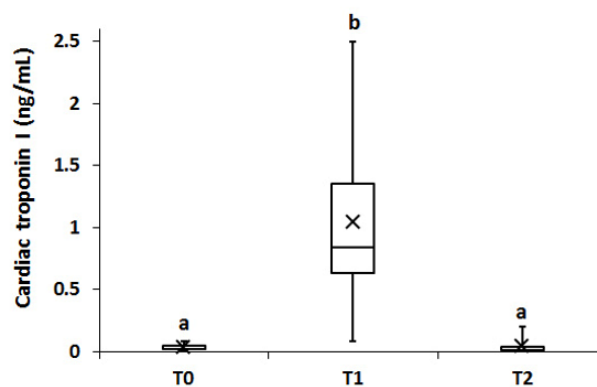


Fig. 4. Box and whiskers plot of cardiac troponin and effect of transportation in horses transported for 300 km. T0, 24 hours before transport; T1, just before transport; T2–T5 at 50,100, 200, and 300 km of transport; T6, 24 hours after transport. The circle and 6 indicates that the animal number 6 is an outlier at T4 (0.04 ng/ml) (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014c).

Cardiac troponin I and pathological conditions Primary cardiac pathologies

Cardiac troponin I was especially elevated in animals affected by primary cardiac diseases. In cattle, it was reported that cTnI was significantly elevated in animals with pericarditis in comparison to healthy cows (Mellanby et al., 2009; Buczinski and Bélanger, 2010). In a *Dorcas gazelle* with vegetation of the mitral valve, cTnI measured 2.18 ng/ml; it declined to 0.09 ng/ml after therapeutic intervention (Tharwat et al., 2014). In newborn goat kids with a cardiac form of nutritional muscular dystrophy, the serum concentration of cTnI was significantly higher than values in healthy kids (11.18 ± 20.07 ng/ml vs. 0.02 ± 0.05 ng/ml; $P = 0.017$) (Fig. 5) (Tharwat et al., 2013e). Twenty-three percent of diseased goat kids had a cTnI level of more than 50 ng/mL. Pathologic findings in the latter study showed macroscopic epicardial and endocardial degeneration, microscopic advanced cardiac degeneration, Zenker's necrosis, remarkable necrotic myocarditis and fibrosed plaques between the muscles and sub-endocardium (Tharwat et al., 2013e).

Secondary cardiac pathologies

Cardiac troponin I is elevated in numerous disorders of non-cardiac origin. In 10 out of 19 cases (53%) of goats with prolonged parturition, the serum concentration of cTnI was significantly increased compared to those with normal birth (0.094 ± 0.155 ng/ml vs. 0.008 ± 0.013 ng/ml). However, 16 out of 18 (89%) goats with pregnancy toxemia showed remarkable increases in serum cTnI that reached a value of 0.852 ± 1.472 ng/ml (Fig. 6) (Tharwat et al., 2012). The significantly elevated cTnI in goats with pregnancy toxemia pointed out the occurrence of severe cardiac

injury, an important factor that explains the deaths of 12 goats with pregnancy toxemia just after admission. Therefore, it was postulated that significantly higher levels of cTnI in goats with pregnancy toxemia suggested a guarded prognosis (Tharwat *et al.*, 2012). In a recent study, it was found that the serum level of cTnI increased significantly in dromedary camels with dystocia compared to those with normal parturition (0.18 ± 0.12 ng/ml vs. 0.03 ± 0.02 ng/ml, $P = 0.0007$) (Tharwat *et al.*, 2024).

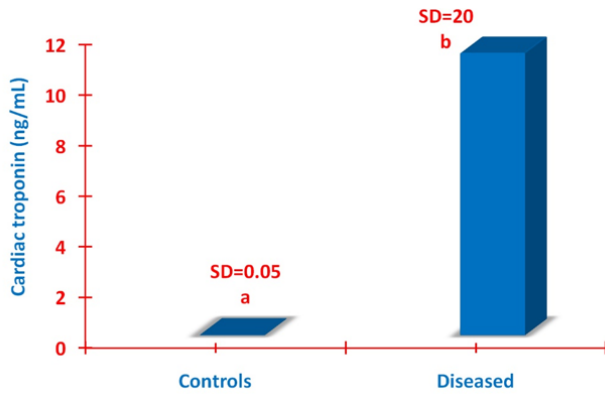


Fig. 5. Cardiac troponin I (cTnI) in goats with cardiac nutritional muscular dystrophy versus healthy controls. ^{a,b} different letters indicate a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) (Tharwat *et al.*, 2013e).

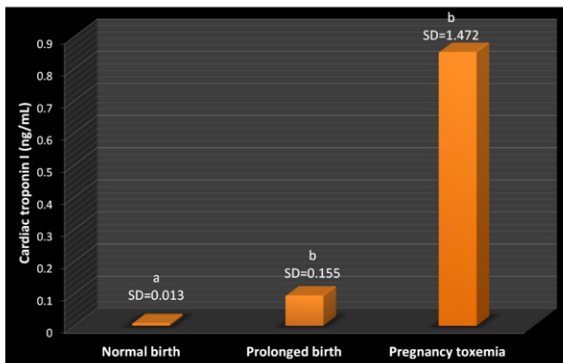


Fig. 6. Comparative mean \pm standard deviation (SD) of cardiac troponin I in goats with normal birth, prolonged birth and in those with pregnancy toxemia. ^{a,b} different letters indicate a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) (Tharwat *et al.*, 2012).

The level of cTnI was reported to be high in animals with long-standing chronic conditions. In dromedary camels with Downer syndrome, the serum concentration of cTnI was 10-fold higher than that in controls (0.01 – 2.20 ng/ml vs. 0.00 – 0.08 ng/ml; $P < 0.05$), revealing a severe degree of myocardial injury (Fig. 7) (Tharwat, 2012). The level of cTnI was also reported to be significantly high in animals with external parasites producing toxins. A special example was reported in camels with tick infestation (1.7 ± 1.6 ng/ml vs. 0.03 ± 0.02 ng/ml in the healthy camels; $P < 0.0001$), pointing out myocardial injury in those animals (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014b).

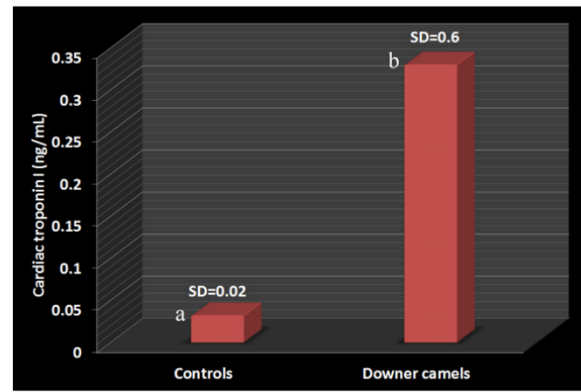


Fig. 7: Cardiac troponin I values in downer camels compared to control healthy camels. ^{a,b} Different letters indicate a significant difference ($P = 0.019$). SD = standard deviation.

In the latter report, cTnI serum levels were used to predict the prognosis of camels with ticks, where the level in recovered camels was 0.36 ± 0.53 ng/ml vs. 3.0 ± 1.1 ng/ml in the camels that did not recover (Fig. 8) (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014b). The increases in cTnI in camels with tick infestation may be due to toxins present in tick saliva (Wernery and Kaaden, 2002), leading to damage to myocardium and skeletal muscles; this was proven by significant elevations in cTnI, creatine kinase and aspartate aminotransferase in the same study (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014b). The results of the latter study are supported by another with high cTnI levels in trials of experimentally induced myocardial damage (O'Brien, 2006). Furthermore, Miranda *et al.*, (2006) found that increased consumption of oxygen by myocardial muscles during long periods of increased heart rate is linked with a decreased supply of oxygen to the myocardium.

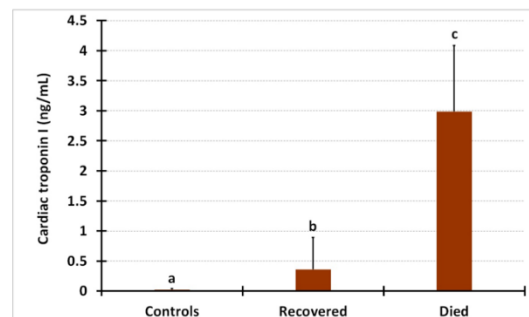


Fig. 8: Mean serum concentrations of serum cardiac troponin I in camels with tick infestation. ^{a,b,c} Different letters indicate a significant difference.

In experimental studies, induction of hypercalcemia in goats led to significant increases in the cTnI significantly during the 4 hours after calcium injection and peaked to 2.1 ng/mL 24 hours post-induction, then dropped gradually till the normal level 6 days after induction. Similar, induction of hypocalcemia in the goats resulted in a significant elevation in serum cTnI during the 4 hours after disodium EDTA injection but decreased at days 1 and 2 after induction and at normal levels thereafter (Fig. 9) (Tharwat and Al-

Sobayil, 2015). Contrary to this, injection of cardiac glycoside into donkeys did not reveal any significant differences in cTnI serum levels compared to pre-injection values (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2014a). However, the effect of general anesthesia had adverse effects on cardiac functions and consequently on serum levels of cTnI.

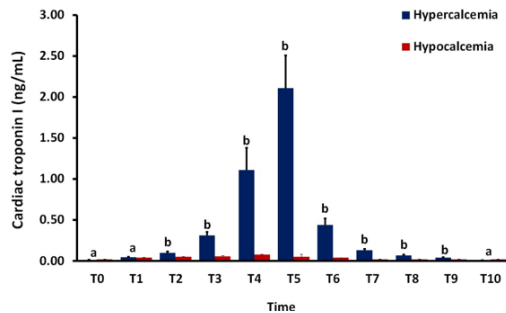


Fig. 9: Mean \pm SD serum concentrations of cardiac troponin I in goats with experimentally induced hyper- and hypocalcemia. T0, immediately before calcium or EDTA injection; T1-T4 at 30, 60, 120 and 240 minutes after injection; T5-T10 at 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 days after injection (Tharwat and Al-Sobayil, 2015). ^{a,b} Differ significantly between goats with induced hyper- and hypocalcemia.

In a trial of halothane and isoflurane general anesthesia in camels, the cTnI level did not increase over 0.04 ng/ml in the isoflurane group. On the other hand, in camels anesthetized with halothane, cTnI values increased greatly 40 minutes and 80 minutes after recovery (0.2 ng/ml and 0.47 ng/ml, respectively); they also increased significantly at days 1 and 2 post-recovery. Serum concentrations of cTnI differed significantly between the halothane and isoflurane groups at 40 minutes, 80 minutes, 24 hours and 48 hours after recovery (Fig. 10) (Tharwat et al., 2013a). The latter report concluded that the anesthetic halothane has an adverse effect on cardiomyocytes in comparison to isoflurane, and hence, halothane should not be used in camels suspected of having a cardiac disorder.

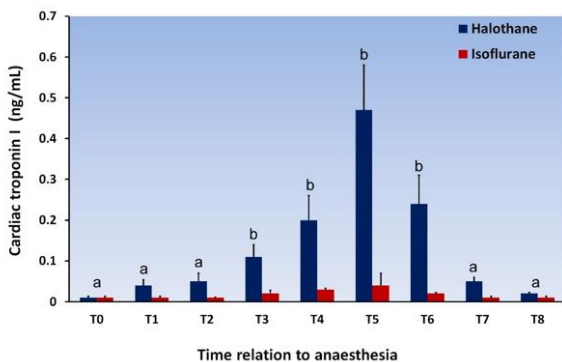


Fig. 10: Pre-anaesthetic, anaesthetic and post-anaesthetic serum concentration of cardiac troponin I (means \pm SEM) in camels (n = 6) undergoing isoflurane and halothane anesthesia. T0, immediately before anesthesia; T1, 20 min after xylazine administration; T2, 20 minutes after ketamine administration; T3, 60 minutes during inhalation anesthesia; T4, 40 minutes of recovery; T5, 80 minutes of recovery; T6-T8, 24 hours, 48 hours and 72 hours after anesthesia (Tharwat et al., 2013a). ^b Differs significantly between the two anesthetic agents at P<0.05.

It was also reported that semen collection through stimulation by electroejaculation (EEJ) affects levels of cTnI. The concentration of serum cTnI increased significantly (P \leq 0.0001) in dromedary camels subjected to EEJ; the concentration declined to pre-experimental levels 24 h later. However, in the camel group with natural mating, serum levels of cTnI did not change significantly post-mating versus pre-mating levels (Fig. 11; Tharwat et al., 2014). The significant increase of cTnI due to stimulation by EEJ suggested myocardial injury by this procedure; this explanation was supported by the non-significant differences in cTnI after natural mating in the same species.

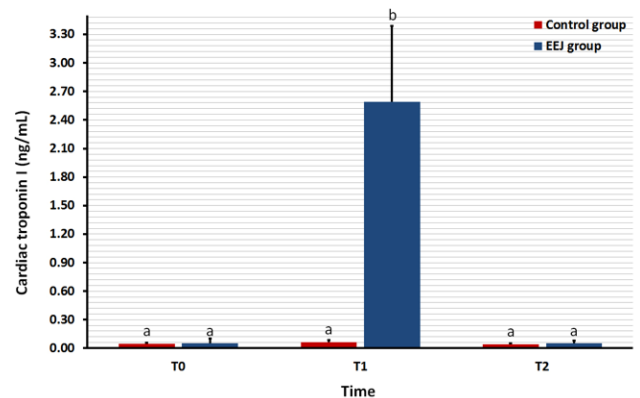


Fig. 11: Effect of stimulation by electroejaculation (EEJ) on cardiac troponin I in male dromedary camels compared with control group. T0: just before EEJ; T1: directly after EEJ; T2: 24 hours after EEJ (Tharwat et al., 2014). ^{a,b} Values differ significantly (P=0.0001).

CONCLUSION

It is evident from various pathophysiologic reports that cTnI is a highly specific biomarker. It can detect myocardial damage due to primary cardiac diseases such as pericarditis, endocarditis and myocarditis. It can also detect cardiac injury in some non-cardiac states that can affect the heart, such as racing competitions, long road transportation, extensive training, difficult parturition, Downer syndrome, general anesthesia, infestation with external parasites such as ticks, calcium injection in extremely high doses, injection of cardiac glycosides, and use of EEJ to collect semen.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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