Nasal Leech Infestation: An Unusual Cause of Epistaxis

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Case Description

- A man in his 60s with no known medical conditions presented to the emergency department with a one-week history of persistent blood-tinged mucous from the right nose. There were no other symptoms, including nasal pain or foreign body sensations. He had been swimming in Nepal one week prior to his presentation.
- No cause for bleeding was seen on anterior rhinoscopy. Rigid nasoendoscopy was performed under topical anaesthesia and, after suctioning of mucous, a live leech became visible on the lateral aspect of the right middle turbinate (Figure 1).

Treatment

- The leech moved posteriorly on initial contact but was successfully removed with Tilley forceps and a Frazier suction. No residual foreign bodies or significant mucosal trauma was identified on repeat nasoendoscopy and no further intervention was needed.
- The leech was placed in hand gel and water and measured to be approximately 6 cm in length (Figure 2).
- The patient was discharged home with saline rinses, and no ongoing symptoms have been reported.

Discussion

- The foreign body was not initially visible on anterior rhinoscopy, highlighting the importance of nasoendoscopy in cases of epistaxis where the source of bleeding is not immediately apparent.
- The absence of sensation may be attributed to the local anaesthetic compounds secreted by leeches during attachment.
- The leech was presumed to have been acquired during the patient's freshwater exposure in Nepal. The case was discussed with the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries who deemed the leech a low biosecurity risk but arranged transport to them as a precaution. Standard cleaning procedures of the room and equipment were recommended.
- While a small number of cases of aerodigestive tract leech infestation have been described (1, 2), to our knowledge, this case represents the first published case in New Zealand.
- Clinicians should consider unusual foreign bodies in patients presenting with epistaxis following recent overseas freshwater exposure.

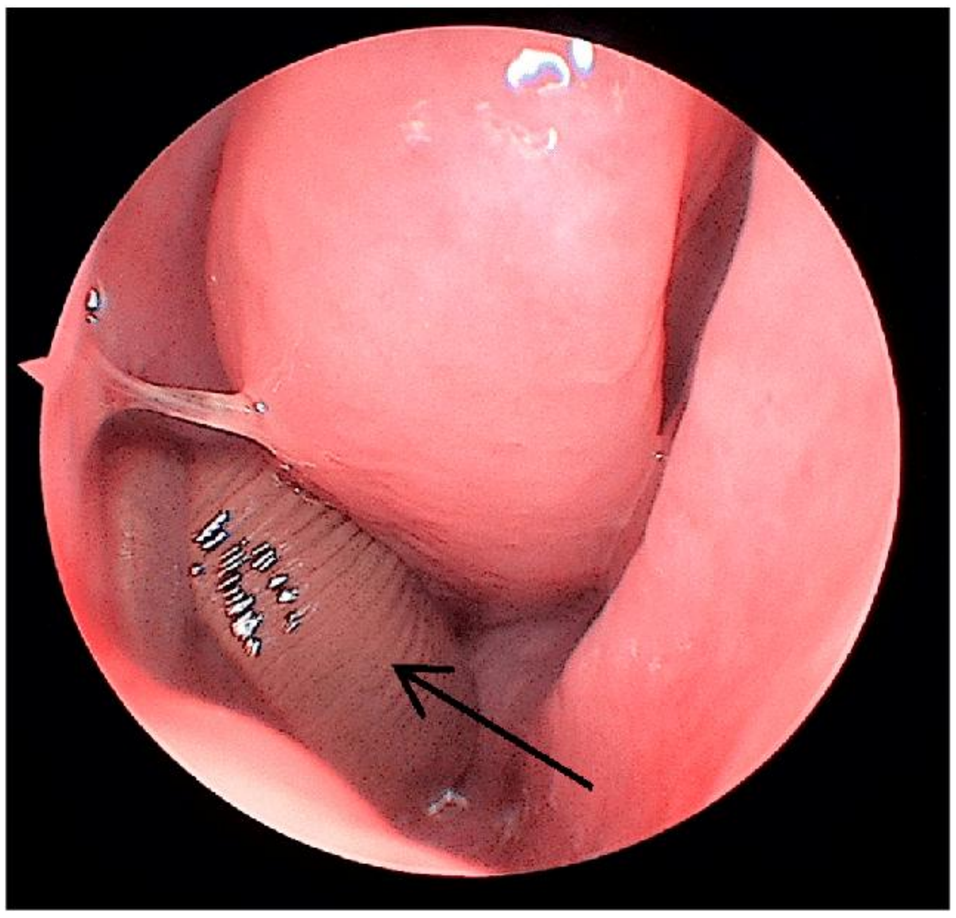

Figure 1 – Nasoendoscopic view demonstrating the location of the leech within the right nasal cavity. This image is illustrative and was not obtained from the patient described in this case (1).

Figure 2 – Leech after removal from nose of this patient.

References

(1) Hou N, Lv D, Zhao K, Xu XL, Yang W, Wang Y. A case of living leech in nasal cavity. Otolaryngol Case Rep. 2021;19:100277. doi:10.1016/j.xocr.2021.100277.

(2) Sarathi K. Nasal leech infestation causing persistent epistaxis. J Emerg Trauma Shock. 2011;4(3):413-4. doi:10.4103/0974-2700.83875.