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# Neuropathogenicity of an atypical anthrax causing bacterium – Bacillus cereus biovar anthracis

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Bacillus anthracis is capable of invading the central nervous system in both animals and humans. It can elicit meningitis, a severe complication of systemic anthrax, with a mortality rate nearing 100 %. In the past two decades, it has become evident that anthrax can be caused by bacteria distinct from B. anthracis. One such bacterium is Bacillus cereus biovar anthracis (Bcbva), which is responsible for wildlife deaths across sub-Saharan African rainforests. Among its hosts is one of our closest relatives, the chimpanzee, suggesting Bcbva's zoonotic character. In this study, we investigated the previously uncharacterized neuropathogenic potential of Bcbva. We examined four formalin-fixed brains from chimpanzees that succumbed to Bcbva infections, using MRI and histology techniques, which were collected under strict biosafety measures as part of an ongoing wildlife health monitoring program in the Taï NP. Our findings revealed that, similar to B. anthracis, Bcbva is capable of breaching the blood-cerebrospinal fluid barrier and invading the meninges. Additionally, all cases exhibited Bcbva infiltration within the brain parenchyma, indicating a higher propensity to penetrate the glia limitans compared to B. anthracis. Moreover, Bcbva was found to extensively degrade brain tissue, as evidenced by significant extracellular matrix degradation. Limited activation of glial cells suggests a rapid demise following infiltration of the central nervous system.

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### **Professional Status of the Speaker**

PhD Student

#### **Junior Scientist Status**

Yes, I am a Junior Scientist.

**Primary author:** GRÄSSLE, Tobias (Helmholtz Institute for One Health, Greifswald, Germany)

Co-authors: JÄGER, Carsten (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany; Paul Flechsig Institute – Center of Neuropathology and Brain Research, Medical Faculty, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany); KIRILINA, Evgeniya (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany); JAUCH, Anna (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany; Paul Flechsig Institute – Center of Neuropathology and Brain Research, Medical Faculty, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany); LIPP, Ilona (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany); WITTIG, Roman M. (Ape Social Mind Lab, Institute of Cognitive Science Marc Jeannerod, UMR 5229, CNRS, Lyon, France; Department of Human Behavior, Ecology and Culture, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany; Taï Chimpanzee Project, Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques, Abidjan, Ivory Coast); CROCKFORD, Catherine (Ape Social Mind Lab, Institute of Cognitive Science Marc Jeannerod, UMR 5229, CNRS, Lyon, France; Department of Human Behavior, Ecology and Culture, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany; Taï Chimpanzee Project, Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques, Abidjan, Ivory Coast); WEISKOPF, Nikolaus (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for

Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany); LEENDERTZ, Fabian H. (Helmholtz Institute for One Health, Greifswald, Germany); MORAWSKI, Markus (Department of Neuropsychology, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany; Paul Flechsig Institute – Center of Neuropathology and Brain Research, Medical Faculty, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany)

**Presenter:** GRÄSSLE, Tobias (Helmholtz Institute for One Health, Greifswald, Germany)

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