

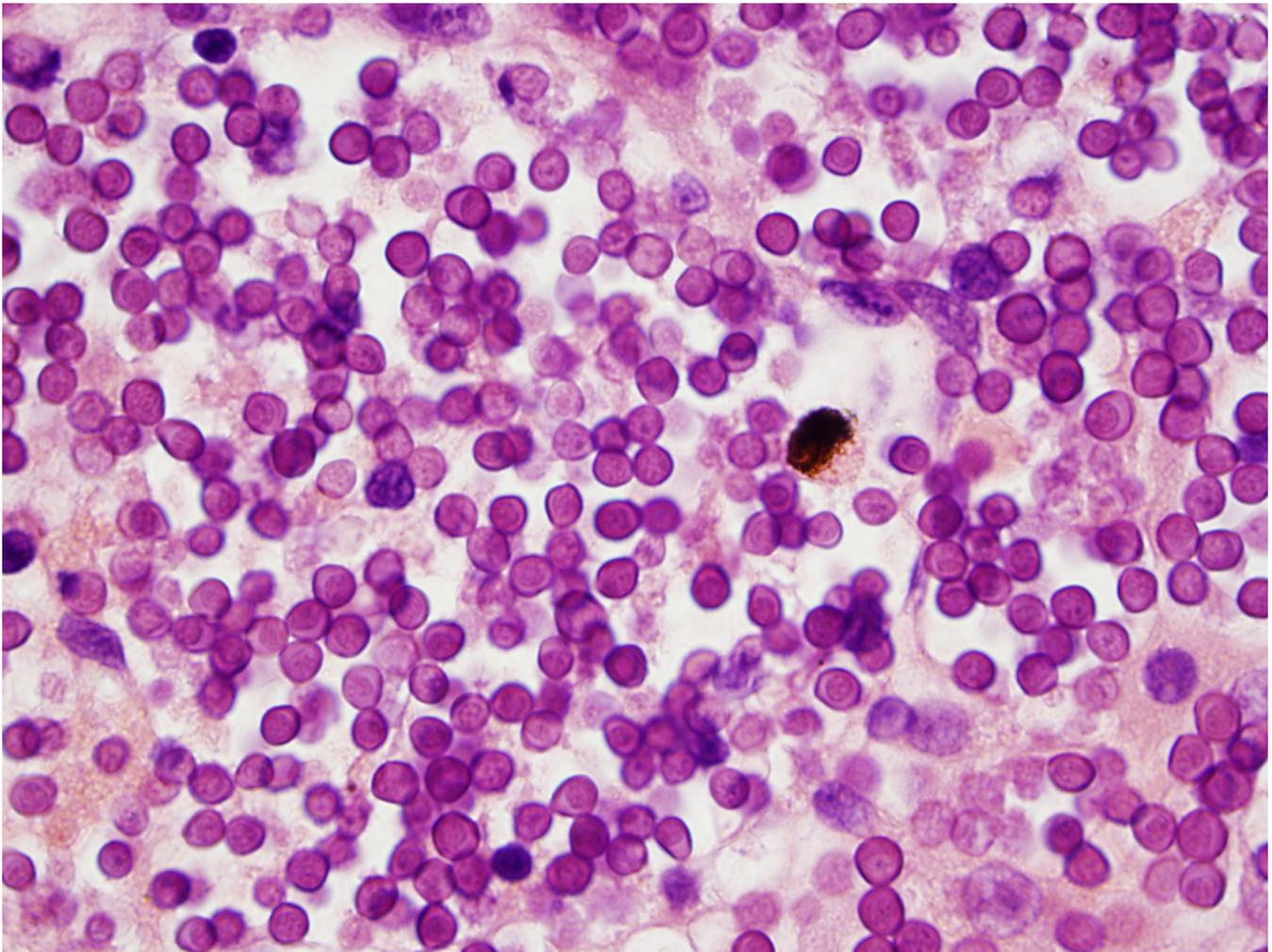
Already troubled tadpoles attacked by new parasite

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By SETH BORENSTEIN The Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Scientists have identified a new problem for amphibians, which are already shrinking in numbers: A parasite is infesting tadpoles worldwide.

The family of parasites, related to a bug that attacks oysters, has been found in the livers of frogs and tadpoles on three continents and in both temperate and tropical climates. Researchers linked it to a mass die-off of tadpoles in a Georgia lake.



This image, magnified 100 times, shows the liver of a tadpole that died in 2006 as part of a mass die-off in a lake in Athens, Ga.. The purple dots are stained parasites that have now turned up in frogs and tadpoles worldwide and pose one more threat for an already declining amphibian population. The Associated Press/Michael J. Yabsley

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“There have been numerous outbreaks with this parasite, what we presume to be the same parasite, all over the eastern part of the United States,” said University of Georgia wildlife ecology professor Michael Yabsley, co-author of a study published Monday by the [Proceedings of the National Academy of](#)

[Sciences](#). “It’s certainly going to be one of the things we are worried about for the long-term health of amphibians.”

Study lead author Thomas Richards said amphibian numbers are already falling because of habitat loss, climate change, fungus and other diseases. He said this new parasite is “just one more threat.”

“I worry about amphibians generally,” said Richards, who is from the University of Exeter in England. Amphibians are the family of animals that include frogs, toads, newts and salamanders.

Richards said it is still unclear how big a problem the parasite is, if at all. That’s because 99 percent of tadpoles don’t make it to frogs anyway, being eaten by predators, he and Yabsley said.

“I am not at all alarmed yet, but I am interested and will keep by eyes peeled,” said University of California biologist David Wake, who wasn’t part of the study. But he did add for amphibians “it seems to be death by a thousand cuts.”

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