

Newsletter July 2020

POISONOUS PLANTS

Cormac White



With most stock all out now and with the dry weather keeping grass in short supply, it is important to be aware of any plants that stock may decide to nibble on that can be toxic in both the short term and the long term. Some plants can cause signs of ill health within a matter of hours and ultimately can lead to death with a period of 24 hours, whilst others may cause more long-term chronic effects on animal health and productivity. It is also important to be aware that differences exist in terms of species susceptibility; certain plants affect certain species (cattle, sheep, goats) worse than others. Most of the toxic compounds that exist in these plants have no specific treatment/prognosis for animals affected by these poisonings and prognosis can be poor, so avoiding exposure is vital in managing this from an animal health point of view.



Water Hemlock/Dead Man's Fingers grows along ditches and hedgerows and the extremely toxic tuberous roots can become exposed following episodes of dry weather. Roots will also be exposed where ditches have been dredged. Cattle exhibit seizures and death rapidly ensues. *It is important to note that spraying it initially makes it more palatable to cattle so allow for it to die back before reintroducing cattle to the area.*

Poison Hemlock is like water hemlock, yet it does not possess the tuberous roots and contains a slightly different toxin. It typically grows in hedgerows and along ditches and areas of woodland. It causes an *increased heart and respiratory rate along with incoordination and eventually seizures and death*. It affects a wider range of species including goats, pigs and wildlife. *Spraying prior to seed stage (typically May and June) will limit the issue in following years.*

Yew is an evergreen ornamental plant and with lockdown there have been cases of people dumping garden waste containing clippings of this plant. *It causes rapid cardiac arrest in stock and 0.5% of an animals' bodyweight is all that is needed to cause death.*

Ragwort is a plant that all should be relatively familiar with. Whilst sheep and goats are relatively resistant to the effects of ragwort, cattle certainly are not. Ragwort causes liver damage which can cause a *rapid disease process involving severe diarrhoea, jaundice, red urine, incoordination, and aggression; or a slow chronic disease process involving weight loss, bottle jaw and photosensitization*. Typically, cattle will avoid ragwort, however it is particularly high in minerals so *mineral-deficient cattle will seek it out and those with a lack of access to other forage. Cattle cannot distinguish ragwort from other plants in silage so cutting fields should be managed appropriately to avoid issues. A single plant in a bale of silage can be enough to cause clinical signs* with 3kg fresh weight of ragwort constituting a lethal dose. *Cutting fields should be sprayed in the autumn prior or where there are only small numbers of plants these can be pulled. It is important to remember that cutting ragwort plants encourages them to become perennial weeds.*



St John's Wort contains a toxin which fluoresces in UV light. When it travels through the blood vessels of the animals skin it reacts with sunlight causing *photosensitization which appears as reddening, hair loss and inflammation typically at the whiter parts of the animals coat - sunburn*. Animals should immediately be *brought inside out of the sunlight. Anti-inflammatories such as Dexafort or Metacam will help.*

Rhododendron is a particularly toxic garden plant to cattle, sheep and goats with 0.2% of an animal's bodyweight being enough to kill an animal (140g for a 70kg ewe!). Typically, animals exhibit signs of vomiting, diarrhoea, colic with decreased heart rates and ultimately death.

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Oak contains tannins in leaves, bark and acorns which are higher in early spring and typically affect the guts and kidneys of the animal with signs of dark black diarrhoea, colic, bloat and sometimes a dark red urine. *These tannins have a bitter taste so animals will typically only consume these plants where there is a lack of access to other forage.* Animals can be treated with aggressive IV fluid therapy.

Bracken Fern is a slightly less toxic plant with large quantities typically needing to be consumed for clinical signs to occur but it is one to be aware of where cattle are short of grass and are spending a lot of time grazing verges, wooded areas and hedgerows. The toxin contained in bracken is called *Ptaquilloside* and is a carcinogen. Occasionally younger animals that consume large quantities over a time can develop a bleeding syndrome as they lack the platelets to allow their blood to clot, however this very rare. *Slightly more common is the older cow who develops blood in her urine because of a bladder tumor as a result of low level bracken consumption for years and years.*

TALKING MENTAL HEALTH

David Taylor



As much as farmers tend to be an independent bunch and are proud of being self-reliant; mental health issues can strike anyone at any time. COVID-19 has come along after a difficult winter, Brexit and with a very dry spring and so it is an important time to think about whether you or someone you know may be struggling to cope. Perhaps you may have a “gut instinct” something is “not OK” or you may have noticed a change in someone’s behaviour e.g.:

- Declining interest in farm, animal or personal care.
- Catastrophic and negative thinking.
- Withdrawing from social interaction with family and friends.
- Stress in the family.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Reliance on alcohol or medication.
- Irrational thinking and difficulty making decisions.



Starting a conversation about how someone is really feeling can make a massive difference and be a start on the road to recovery. There are number of organisations that can help:

- **FCN** - Tel. 03000 111 999 - help@fcn.org.uk
- **RABI** - Tel. 08082 819 490
- **Samaritans** - Tel. 116 123 - jo@samaritans.org

FCN
THE FARMING
COMMUNITY
NETWORK

If you feel you or someone else is at immediate risk, then dial 999 and ask to speak to the police. Also, vets are never so busy that we cannot stop and have a chat for a few minutes. We are not mental health professionals, but we can lend a friendly, understanding and compassionate ear.

R·A·B·I
Supporting Farming Families

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS

Please note that we have now changed our regular email address to the address below:

office@thefarmvets.co.uk

RELIEF MILKER NEEDED

Permanent relief milker required near Bridgwater. Excellent farm, accommodation available and possibility of relief on neighbouring farm.

Contact **07967567479** for more details.