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Lice on cattle

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SIX different species of cattle lice occur in Australia including both sucking and biting types. Both types produce symptoms of skin irritation but the sucking lice are the more serious since they feed in clusters, piercing the skin and sucking up blood and tissue foods, whereas the biting lice feed only on scurf and scales on the surface of the skin. Heavy lice infestations cause acute irritation and the cattle are constantly rubbing against fences and trees to allay the discomfort. The presence of lice in large numbers causes retarded growth and loss of condition.

The lice lay their eggs close to the skin of the animal, where they are found glued to the hair. These eggs hatch in 8 to 13 days, giving rise to a new generation of lice which commence to produce eggs in from 13 to 17 days so that the complete life-cycle from egg to egg occupies only 21 to 30 days.

The most common species found in the South-West of Western Australia is the long-nosed sucking louse (Linognathus vituli) which often infests young cattle in great numbers during winter and spring. These parasites attain a length of about one-tenth of an inch, and are dark bluish in colour. The head is long and narrow, being twice as long as its width. When associated with worm infestation and inadequate nutrition these lice may contribute to the unthriftiness and mortality which is often reported among calves and young cattle during the winter months.

For the control of lice in cattle, dipping or spraying with 0.5% DDT or 0.5% gamma isomer B.H.C. (gammexane) may be recommended. Suspensions of the desired concentration may be prepared from proprietary preparations available on the market, or in the case of B.H.C., any of the gammexane sheep dips at four times the strength recommended for sheep may be used. Due to the fact that these substances remain deadly to lice for a long period after application, a single treatment will usually effect complete eradication by destroying young lice which may subsequently hatch from the eggs. If it is desired to make doubly sure, a second treatment after an interval of 14 days is advisable.—C.R.T.