Book review - New handbook on poison plants

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NEW HANDBOOK ON POISON PLANTS
An Outstanding West Australian Publication

The West Australian Government Botanist (Mr. C. A. Gardner) and the Principal of
the Animal Health and Nutrition Laboratories (Dr. H. W. Bennetts), are the co-
authors of a new publication "Toxic Plants of Western Australia," which undoubtedly
sets a new high standard in pastoral and farming literature.

The book, which has been entirely
produced in Western Australia by the
Periodicals Division of West Australian
Newspapers Ltd., is a handsome volume
measuring 10in. x 8in. containing 252 pages
of letterpress with 52 full-page colour
plates by Edgar Dell and C. A. Gardner and
45 full-page line drawings by C. A. Gardner.
It is particularly well-printed on paper of
an exceptionally high quality and is at-
tractively bound in red with white letter-
ing.

The reputations of the authors in the
fields of botany and veterinary pathology
respectively are in themselves a guarantee
of the authenticity and knowledgeable
presentation of the subject matter.

In a forward to the book, the Director
of Agriculture (Mr. G. K. Baron Hay)
writes:

"The authors have achieved, in a
single book of moderate size, the most
difficult task of presenting botanical
data in a manner to satisfy scientific
readers, while permitting those know-
ing little of botany—but who are in-
terested in the toxic properties of
suspected plants—to establish their
identity and to recognise the symp-
toms of poisoning in stock which may
have eaten them.

"This collection of valuable records
may never have been assembled if the
authors, as young men 30 years ago,
had not only been brought together
officially, but had found also social
interests which led to a deep and last-
ing friendship. A better team would
be difficult to imagine, an outstand-
ing botanist prepared to literally
tramp the wilds in search of speci-
mens and a keenly trained veterinary
pathologist to observe and record
authoritatively the toxicological data."

The need for a book of this nature has
long been evident, as stock losses from
poison plants have been a feature of West-
ern Australian livestock husbandry from
the beginning of agricultural and pastoral
settlement until the present day.

Individual articles have been written
from time to time covering special aspects
of the plant poisons, but stockowners have
always felt the need of a publication
which would present all the information
available in concise form.

Such a publication is now available in
"Toxic Plants of Western Australia"— a
work which will be acceptable to scientist
and layman alike. The written descrip-
tions of the plants, together with the
magnificent illustrations in colour and
black and white, make the recognition and
identification of the plants simple, even
to one with no academic knowledge of
botany.

The book covers a wide field, including
not merely those plants known to contain
definite toxic principles but species such
as stinkwort which are responsible for
mechanical damage to the intestinal lin-
ing, and others such as Guildford grass
which may give rise to "hair-balls" that
can cause obstruction of the bowels or
stomach.
Many plants, normally regarded as valuable fodder species have been included in the book; thus we find subterranean clover and the West Australian blue lupin described, both of which can be potentially dangerous if taken as the main constituent of the diet over a long period; burr trefoil which can cause photosensitisation; \textit{Phalaris tuberosa} and ryegrasses which can cause "staggers," as well as a number of plants which, under certain conditions may contain dangerous quantities of prussic acid.

The system of presentation followed throughout the book is an excellent one, consisting of a description of the plant with its history followed by an account of its toxicity, the symptoms of poisoning and, where available, the details of feeding tests and other veterinary data.

A series of appendices give much valuable information. Appendix I. gives the distribution of various poison plants throughout the State; Appendix II. lists the cyanogenic plants occurring in Western Australia; Appendix III. lists the plants causing photosensitivity; and other appendices group the plants according to various symptoms.

There is a comprehensive glossary of botanical and veterinary terms and a well-compiled general index that makes for rapid and easy reference.

Altogether it is a volume in which both the authors and the publishers can take justifiable pride. It is a book that will be appreciated by pastoralists and farmers as well as by botanists, agricultural scientists and members of scientific institutions throughout the world.

It is available at the extremely low price of £2 10s. plus 1s. 9d. postage and may be obtained from the publishers, West Australian Newspapers Ltd., Newspaper House, Perth.
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