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Fodder shrubs in the Murchison

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THE Murchison pastoral country is usually thought of as either having a perennial grass cover, as in the Wandarrie, or as Mulga country with trees and short grass.

It is easy to overlook the small shrubs which occur all over the Murchison in every type of situation, and can provide high quality feed for sheep.

These shrubs grow from two to five feet high. Sometimes they are obviously present, but mostly they are so scarce that they blend in with the other vegetation and don't seem to be very important.

It was not always like this. In fact, at one time shrubs were much more plentiful than they are today. You have only to go into open country to see the wealth of different feeds that exist. Most of these are shrubs.

We can probably blame a combination of droughts and uncontrolled grazing for the disappearance of these important plants through most of our settled and developed country.

These shrubs are all good feeds. A large number of them have been analysed, and some have nutritive values as high as lucerne at about 20 per cent. crude protein. Most of the others vary between 12 and 15 per cent. crude protein, which is still very good.

As well as being nutritious most of these valuable plants are palatable to stock. It is therefore not surprising that they have disappeared from most of the grazing land in the Murchison, where stock have uncontrolled access to them at all times.

In some cases unpalatable shrubs are found with the better species, and these survive and multiply, so that instead of the original good mixed pasture of grasses and palatable shrubs, the pasture only consists of grass as far as stock are concerned. The tremendous increase in turpentine bush that has taken place in a lot of this country is a good example of the type of change that is taking place.

In most places, however, the shrubs disappear altogether, and only the mulga trees and grasses are left.

A lot of people think that shrubs are increasing again because they see a lot of purple flowered flannel bush. This is a false impression.

We have found that flannel bush takes the place of better shrubs and is not as good as the original ones. This becomes obvious in dry times, when the flannel bush loses all its leaves. The same is true...