

## *Asclepias curassavica*

### **Common name:**

Redhead cotton bush, Milkweed,

### **Palatability to Livestock:**

Not usually eaten.

### **Toxicity to Goats:**

Toxic, moderate risk.

### **Toxicity to Other Species:**

Cattle, sheep, horses, donkeys, pigs.

### **Poisonous Principle:**

Cardiac glycosides, (cardenolide, gofruside).

### **Effects:**

#### *Signs and symptoms;*

- . Loss of appetite, depression,
- . Diarrhoea, maybe blood stained,
- . Bloating, swelling under jaw,
- . Slow irregular heart-beat, feeble pulse,
- . Breathing difficulties, bluish gums,
- . PM shows internal haemorrhages.

#### *Health and Production Problems;*

- . Severely affected animals may collapse and die with breathing problems, and bluish gums.
- . Illness may last for several days, showing depression, diarrhoea, irregular heart-beat, and the animal may recover if treated.

#### *Treatment;*

- . See Vet as soon as possible.
- . Try activated charcoal drench.
- . Electrolyte replacement.

### **Integrated Control Strategy:**

- . Plants are not usually palatable, but can be eaten if other feed is scarce, or accidentally eaten with other feed.
- . Hand pull into disposable bags, especially the seeds pods. (Best way).
- . Spot spray with herbicide, try glyphosate, however, it is difficult to kill in this way.

### **Comments:**

- . An erect perennial shrub, growing to over a metre high, stems are green at the base, and reddish at the top.
- . Stems and leaves exude a milky sap, when damaged.
- . Leaves are opposite, dark green to reddish green, long and narrow, (6 – 15cm), tapering to a point at both ends, and located towards the end of the stems.
- . Small bunches of flowers grow at the ends of branches. They are red, with an orange centre, the petals are curved backwards.
- . The fruit is a long narrow pod, which splits open to set loose flat seeds with silky hairs at one end.
- . Flowering and fruiting is from late winter to autumn, germination is in spring.
- . An introduced weed from tropical America, now found in coastal Queensland, NSW, and Western Australia. Often found in shady areas, with high rainfall, on roadsides, etc.
- . Ruminants are more tolerant of this plant than horses, most cases of poisoning occur in dairy cattle, when feed is scarce.



Picture: *Asclepias curassavica*  
gvcocks.homeip.netPlantFamilies

### **Further Reading;**

- . Auld and Medd. Weeds. 1992.
- . Dowling & McKenzie. Poisonous Plants. 1993.
- . McBarron. Poisonous Plants. Handbook. 1983.
- . Simmonds, Holst and Bourke. Potential Toxicity and Palatability of Australian Weeds to Goats. 2000.
- . Swarbrick and Skarratt. Bushweed 2 Database. 1997.
- . Wilson. Some Plants are Poisonous. 1997