

Cheilanthes spp

Common name:

Rock fern, Mulga fern,

Palatability to Livestock:

Seldom eaten.

Toxicity to Goats:

Moderate risk.

Toxicity to Other Species:

Toxic to sheep, cattle, horses and pigs.

Poisonous Principle:

Thiaminases, as well as norsesquiterpene glucocides, notably ptaquiloside.

Effects:

Signs and symptoms;

Two different outcomes are possible –

. Either depression, confusion, disinterest in surroundings, apparent blindness, head pressing and eventually recumbency with episodic convulsions.

. Alternately, animals may develop an anaemic condition that shows up best when they are forced to exercise, and results in their sudden collapse with laboured breathing.

. They may also display blood in nasal discharges, faeces or urine, together with small haemorrhages of the skin around the mouth, nose, rectum and vagina.

Health and Production Problems;

. The first condition results in death within days.

. Second condition results in chronic anaemia and ill-thrift, due to bone marrow destruction, and apparent sudden death if forced to exercise.

Treatment;

. None. Be aware of potential stock problems.

Integrated Control Strategy:

. Metsulfuron®, and wetting agent.

. Improve the soil, and fertilise.

Comments:

. Tufted, short, creeping, dainty, perennial ferns with rhizomes, and erect dark green leaves on thin dark brown stalks.

. Under dry conditions the fronds curl up and appear dead, but they usually expand after rain.

. The rough underground stem just below the surface can grow all year, especially after rain.

. These plants are generally avoided, but there is a tendency for them to be eaten in drought periods when there is little else available.

. Casual ingestion is safe, but too much is dangerous.

. Most poisonings are in April – September.

. Experimental evidence suggests that fern-infested paddocks can be grazed safely if animals are moved after about ten days, and rested in fern-free areas for about three weeks.

. Found throughout Australia.

. They may occur in exposed sites in pastures, woodlands and rocky areas, and form dense mats.



Picture: *Cheilanthes spp* Helen Simmonds. Calga NSW.

Further Reading:

. Auld and Medd. Weeds. 1992

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. McBarron. Poisonous Plants, Handbook. 1983

. Simmonds, Holst and Bourke, Palatability and Potential Toxicity of Australian Weeds to Goats. 2000