

## Identification of poisonous Plants and their toxic effects on Livestock in and around Bako district, West Shoa Zone, Oromia regional state, Western Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** Poisonous plants are one of the causes of livestock health problems all over the world and bring significant economic loss. Therefore, a cross-sectional study was conducted in and around Bako district West Shoa Zone of Oromia regional state, Western Ethiopia from November 2015 to May 2016 with the objectives of identifying poisonous plants and their toxic effect in the study area. In order to put the objective into practice, structured questionnaires were developed and 153 individuals (139 livestock owners and 14 animal health practitioners) were interviewed on voluntary basis. The study revealed that 122 (87.8%) of livestock owners and 14 (100%) of animal health practitioner complained the presence of plant poisoning on livestock in the study area. Similarly, 37 plants were identified as having poisoning effect on livestock, among which *Trifolium hybridum*, *Sorghum bicola*, *Amaranthus spp*, *Datura stramonium* and *Plantago lanceolata* had the highest botanical frequency. According to the result of survey, agricultural expansion, drought, soil erosion and overgrazing predispose the livestock to plant poisoning. In the same way, almost all of the livestock were managed by extensive type of production system which allows them to browse poisonous perennial herbs on the fields. On the other hand, the livestock were poisoned by leaves and other parts of the identified poisonous plants through ingestion or contact. In conclusion, from the current study, high numbers of poisonous plants were obtained in the study area. Hence, the livestock health in the area is at high risk of exposure to these toxic plants and therefore the government should intervene to create awareness among the community about the effects of these plants and for further phyto chemical and toxicological studies and possibly pharmacological activity.

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**Keywords:** Botanical frequency, Ethiopia, livestock, Poisonous plants, structured questionnaire

### 1. Introduction

Plants add a touch of color and fragrance to our daily lives. They also inject an element of anger in our lives and they cannot move to escape their predators. So all, plants have other means of protecting themselves from the herbivores. Some plants have physical defenses such as thorns. But others contain some toxin. Chemical defenses of plants against consumption by herbivores are determined by non nutrient compounds such as fiber, lignin, cellulose, toxicants or essential oils and other volatile substances. Some volatile substances are overtly toxic; others are merely unpleasant (Radwan, 1974).

Plant poisoning is due to either accidental ingestion of material eaten along with grass or willful consumption of poisonous plants when pasture is dry while most poisonous plants remain green all the year round. It is also more likely to occur in animals which have been moved from one part of the country to another. New importations are unfamiliar with the strange ingestion of their fresh surrounding. Acclimatization in herbivores animals induces a sense

of discrimination between edible and non-edible parts (Mugera, 1970).

Even though many of the medical substances produced by plants, some of them have been reported as toxic (Botha and Penrith, 2009; Gilbert, 2012). Plants may cause toxic effects or even death as a result of accidental exposure by skin contact/absorption, eye exposure and inhalation or accidental ingestion of the plant parts (seed, fruit, root, etc.) while owners usually does not even suspect their toxic nature (Slaughter *et al.*, 2012; Tamilselvan *et al.*, 2014). Plants affect animals in many ways although symptoms and lesions differ depending on the amount of the plant consumed. The common symptoms however include chronic illness debilitation, decreased weight gain, abortion, abdominal discomfort, salivation, congenital defects, photosensitization and sudden death can occur without the presentation of clinical signs (Botha and Penrith, 2008).

Correctly and rapidly diagnosing a plant poisoning is often extremely difficult. In many cases, initial clinical signs are non-specific (such as diarrhea) and post-mortem lesions may be absent. However,

diagnosis of plant poisoning of livestock depends on the history, clinical syndrome observed, post-mortem lesions, evidence that plants have been grazed, and remains of toxic plants in the gastro intestinal tract. In addition, specialized veterinary toxicology laboratories may provide testing for plant toxins and should be consulted. Thus, the best way to support a diagnosis of a plant poisoning is to confirm the presence of a toxic plant in the animal's environment, and to confirm that the plant has been ingested (Puschner, 2008).

Awareness of poisonous plants growing in a certain geographical region and their associated clinical signs are instrumental in making a diagnosis and initiate treatment (Kaufmann, 1986). It is important to establish an accurate diagnosis in order to provide adequate treatment to affected animals, carefully and accurately assess the potential for the transfer of toxins into edible products and prevent further exposures. Most importantly, recognition of poisonous plants in hay or forage may help prevent plant poisonings in animals (Filigenzi and Puschner, 2005).

In Ethiopia, to this date, most of the available information about poisonous plants is case reports. Thus, it is virgin area for interested researchers to fill available gaps regarding paucity of information on the effects of poisonous plants on livestock. Therefore, the objective of the study was to identify different poisonous plants and their toxic effects on livestock in and around the study area.

## 2. Materials and Methods

**2.1 Study area:** The study was conducted from November 2015 to May 2016 in and around Bako district, Western Showa Zone, Oromia regional state, Western Ethiopia. The district is located at 258 Km west of Addis Ababa. It lies between 90° 60' and 37°09'E longitude and on the altitude of 16500M above sea level. The mean annual rain fall is 1210 mm. The rainy period ranges from April to October. It has a warm, humid climate with, mean minimum, mean maximum and average temperature of 13.2<sup>oc</sup>, 27.9<sup>oc</sup> and 21<sup>oc</sup> respectively. Its relative humidity reaches 62.9% per day. About 60% of the soil is reddish brown with slightly acidic reaction. The farming system at the area is crop-livestock mixed farming. The number of livestock population of the area was, cattle in head (141393), sheep (12880), goat (14641), horse (3795), mule (1054) and donkey (8668) (BTWAORD, 2015).

**2.2 Study Population:** The target study populations were voluntary animal owners and animal health practitioners. A total of 139 animal owners and 14 animal health practitioners were interviewed by employing closer approaches to collect important data relevant to the study.

**2.3 Study Design and Sampling Methods:** A cross-sectional study design was used to interview voluntary animal owners and animal health practitioners. For this study, structured questionnaire were designed to collect information related to plant poisoning on livestock in the study area. Questionnaire survey was carried out on the selected individuals by interviewing voluntary animal owners, and animal health practitioners. Livestock owners and animal health professionals were randomly selected for the interview. Among other districts of west showa zone, the Bako district was purposefully selected by taking into consideration of factors as distance of the area from west showa zone leading to absence of any conducted research concerning plant poisoning and a variety of plant vegetation cover in the area.

**2.4. Study Method:** The Study was conducted through questionnaire surveys designed for livestock owners and animal health professionals. A total of 153 individuals were interviewed from the district by applying face to face approach. The structured questionnaire was used to collect information related to toxic plants to livestock and its associated risk factors such as agricultural expansion, drought, over grazing and soil erosion. The plants were collected with their local name from surrounding forests and other sites where the plant is found with the interviewed individuals. The botanic (scientific) names of the complained and collected poisonous plants were obtained from National Herbarium of Biology Department, Natural Science Faculty of Wollega University through consultation.

**2.5. Data Management and Analysis:** After collection of data on suspected poisonous plants to livestock, through structured questionnaire, they were stored in the Microsoft Excel spread sheet 2007. Before the analysis of the coded data, it was filtered. Finally, it was analyzed through SPSS Version 20. Lastly by applying descriptive statistics, the frequencies were calculated.

## 3. Results

In this study, a total of 153 individuals were interviewed, of which 139 individuals were livestock owners and 14 individuals were animal health practitioners by employing structured questionnaire. Out of interviewed, 122 individuals complained the presence of poisonous plants in the study area where as 17 individuals had no information about the presence of these plants in that study area. Similarly, all of interviewed animal health practitioners informed the presence of these toxic plants (Table 1). During the present study, a total of 37 plants were identified which have poisonous effects on livestock by interviewed individuals. Among these plants *Trifolium hybridum* (9.4%), *Sorghum bicola* (7.9%),

*Amaranthus spp* (6.5%), *Datura Stramonium* (4.3%) and *Plantago lanceolata* (4.3%) were the most frequently complained toxic plants (Table 2).

According to the result of current study, livestock were mainly poisoned through contact and/or ingestion of leaves (51.1%) and other parts of the

poisonous plants which account for 34.5% (stem, seed and fruit). On the other hand, livestock were predisposed to these toxic plants due to agricultural expansion (29.5%), drought (22.3%), soil erosion (8.6%) and overgrazing (3.6%).

**Table 1:** Summary of number respondents on poisonous plants in the study area

Group Interviewed	Number interviewed	Number of informants	
		Have information about poisonous plant	Have no information about poisonous plant
Livestock Owners	139	122(87.8%)	17(12.2%)
Animal health practitioners	14	14(100%)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>136(88.9%)</b>	<b>17(11.1%)</b>

**Table 2:** Summary of identified poisonous plants according to their botanical and local (Oromic) name, poisonous parts, susceptible species and harmful effects

Botanic name	Local name (Afaan Oromo)	Botanic frequency	Poisonous part (s)	Susceptible species of animal	Harmful effects of Toxic plant
<i>Nicotina tabaccum</i>	Tamboo	2	Leaf	All animals	Abortion, birth defects, staggering weakness
<i>Hordium vulgare</i>	Garbuu	2	Leaf, stem	All animals	Oral irritation and abscessation
<i>Glossypium spp</i>	Jirbii	1	Other parts	Bovines	Vomiting, diarrhea
<i>Bambusa vulgaris</i>	Leemmana	1	Leaf	Bovine, Caprine, Ovines	paresis of the tongue, depression, ataxia, and incoordination.
<i>Arisaema eunaephyllum</i>	Boqollo warabessa	3	Other parts	Bovines, Caprines	Respiratory distress, trebling, coma, death
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	Asangira	6	All parts	Bovines	Pupils dilate, thirst, dry and burning skin
<i>Guizotia scabra</i>	Tuufu gurracha	4	Leaf	Bovines	Neurologic signs
<i>Curly dock</i>	Baala warante	2	Other parts	Caprines	Restlessness
<i>Amaranthus spp</i>	Raafuu	9	Leaf	Bovine, Ovine, Caprine	Bloating, anorexia
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Qorxobi	6	Leaf and stem	Bovine, Ovine	Bloating, diarrhea
<i>Trifolium hybridum</i>	Sidisa	13	Leaf and stem	Bovine, Ovine	Bloating, diarrhea
<i>Prunus africana</i>	Hoomii	4	Leaf	Caprine, Bovine, Ovine	Diarrhea, loss of appetite, depression
<i>Snowdina polystarchia</i>	Muujja	5	Leaf stem	Bovine, Ovine	Bloating, colic, diarrhea
<i>Sorghum bicola</i>	Misinga	11	Leaf	Bovine, Ovine	Bloating, dyspnea
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	Koshoshi	1	Leaf	Ovine, Bovine	Respiratory distress, depression
<i>Ranunculus sardous</i>	Balalaga	3	Leaf, stem	Ovines	Oral and gastro entestinal irritation
<i>Urtica doca</i>	Gurgube	9	Leaf, stem	All animals	Skin burn
<i>Solanium carolinense</i>	Hiddi	2	Other parts	Ovine, Bovine	Diarrhea, loss of appetite, depression
<i>Solanum spp</i>	Dinnicha	3	Other parts	Bovines	Depression, salivation, diarrhea
<i>Lycopersicon</i>	Timatima	2	Leaf and	Bovines	Salivation, abdominal pain,

Botanic name	Local name (Afaan Oromo)	Botanic frequency	Poisonous part (s)	Susceptible species of animal	Harmful effects of Toxic plant
<i>esculentum</i>			stem		anorexia
<i>Malus sylvestris</i>	Appiilii	1	Leaf	Ovines, Equines	Vomiting, breathing difficulty, stomach pain
<i>Allium spp</i>	Qulubi dima	1	All parts	All animals	Diarrhea, ataxia, weakness, coma
<i>Ricinus Cumunus</i>	Qobbo	5	All parts	Bovine, Ovine	Weakness, salivation diarrhea, mydriasis, teeth grinding
<i>Giradinia bollossa</i>	Doobbii	3	Leaf and stem	All animals	Restlessness and irritation
<i>Acacia abynica</i>	Kichu laaftoo	1	Leaf	Bovines, Caprines	Bloating
<i>Sesbaniya exaltata</i>	Sasbaniya	2	Other parts	All animals	Walking stiffly, Diarrhea, Hemorrhaging
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Tirimi	4	All parts	Bovine equine	In coordination, nervousness, Anemia
<i>Lantana camara</i>	Akayi simbira	2	All parts	Bovine	Photosensitization
<i>Persea americana</i>	Avokaadoo	2	Leaf	Caprine, Ovine	Mastitis, heart failure
<i>Hyparrhenia rufa</i>	Sarmalle	2	Leaf, stem	Bovines	Sub mandibular swelling, weight loss
<i>Phytolacae dodecandra</i>	Handoode	2	Other parts	All animals	Diarrhea, salivation, depression
<i>Albatia schimperiana</i>	Mukarba	1	Leaf	Caprines, Ovines	Abdominal pain, depression, reduced appetite
<i>Solanium nigrum</i>	Hawiti saroota	2	All parts	Bovines, Ovines	Constipation diarrhea, salivation
<i>Medico sativa</i>	Alfalfaa	5	Leaf, stem	Bovines, ovines, equines	Bloating, diarrhea
<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Waanjabi	3	All parts	Bovine, Ovine, Caprine	Diarrhea, ataxia, salivation, coma
<i>Tagets spp</i>	Awalmidagsitu	1	All parts	Ovines, Caprines	Skin irritation
<i>Nerium spp</i>	Holaandari	1	All parts	Equines, Bovines	Depression, salivation, weakness

The present study also shown that almost all livestock were managed under extensive management system (76.3%) whereas (0.7%) of livestock were intensively managed (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Summary of management systems practiced in the study area

S/N <sup>o</sup>	Management system	Number Interviewed	Number of informants
1	Intensive	153	1(0.7%)
2	Sem-intensive	153	15(10.8%)
3	Extensive	153	106(76.3%)

#### 4. Discussion

The current study showed that phyto poisoning is one of the causes of ill health in livestock in the study area. Out of 153 interviewed individuals (139 of livestock owners and 14 animal health professionals), 87.8% of livestock owners and 100% animal health professionals informed that plant poisoning is posing significant livestock health problems in the area. According to information collected from the

respondents, the condition is provoked by scarcity of forage supply due to different reasons such as agricultural expansion, drought, soil erosion, over grazing which force animals to browse perennial shrubs and bushes while most of these perennial plants have been known to contain toxic secondary metabolites and the result of this study was in agreement with the study findings reported in the Sokoto state, Nigeria (Ebbo *et al.*, 2003, Onyeyili *et*

al., 1996) by sharing similar risk factors and also with research finding reported from in the North Central America (Martison *et al.*, 2006).

In this study, 37 plants having toxic effect to livestock were identified. Of these, *Trifolium hybridum* (13), *Sorghum bicola* (11), *Amaranthus spp* (9), *Datura Stramonium* (6) and *Plantago lanceolata* (6) were the most frequently complained toxic plants. Some of the plants identified in this study were similar to those plants identified in and around Nekemte town in which *Sorghum bicolar* (26), *Medicago burweed* (19), *Snowdenia polystachia* (12), Grass species, *Pteridium aquilinum* (10 and *Amaranthus spp* (3) were the most frequently complained poisonous plants (Abraham *et al.*, 2015). However, there was also variation in the distribution and variety of many poisonous plants in both Nekemte town and Bako district. The differences might be due to various plants grow in different geographical areas that have different edaphic and climatic factors. These factors also contribute to the variations in the chemical compositions of different poisonous plants in different areas. In the same manner, the variation might also be due to differences in the level of information about these plants in the community from which the information was collected (Dereje *et al.*, 2014).

According to data obtained from different published literatures, most of the currently identified poisonous plants have worldwide importance. For instance, *Medico sativa* is phytotoxic plant containing phytoestrogen which is responsible for the reproductive disorders in addition to bloating and other related effects to poisoned animals in the study area. Similar harmful effect of this poisonous plant was also reported in Colombia (Seguin, 2004 and Munro, 2009).

The livestock poisoning due to nitrate accumulators such as *Conium maculatum* and *Sorghum bicola* is not only important in the study area, but also they posed serious livestock health problem somewhere else. The current study revealed that, an increase in the degree of livestock poisoning by these toxic plants is correlated with factors such as drought which was agreed with the findings reported in USA (NRC, 1972, Galey *et al.*, 1992 and Panter *et al.*, 1988). Similarly, the importance of *Trifolium spp*s, *Ricinus cumunus* and *Acacia spp* as causes of livestock poisoning have been published in the different literatures (Munro, 2009). *Pterididium aquilinum* (Bracken fern) is also widely distributed in many parts of the world. In Ethiopia, its existence and importance as a cause of enzootic hematuria has been previously shown in different regions (Radostits, 2007) and it has also been reported elsewhere (Radeleff, 1964).

The results of current study also indicated that livestock production in the study area was mostly extensive type with a very low population of animals kept under intensive production systems. Land used for extensive grazing cattle contains complex mixes of native and invasive plants which may increase the risk of exposure to toxic plants, many of which have not been identified and characterized to avoid livestock exposure and this finding was in agreement with study result reported by (Tokarnia *et al.*, 2006) in Brazil.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

In general, based on the results of present study, it is possible to conclude that, plant poisoning was one of the livestock health problems in and around the Bako district. Out of the 37 identified poisonous plants, *Trifolium hybridum*, *Sorghum bicola*, *Amaranthus spp*, *Datura Stramonium* and *Plantago lanceolata* were the most commonly incriminated poisonous plants in the study area. The predisposing factors for the occurrence of plant poisoning were identified as agricultural expansion, drought, soil erosion and overgrazing during the study.

Depending on the result of present study, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- ❖ Preventing livestock from grazing the pasture infested by poisonous plants.
- ❖ During drought season providing livestock with sufficient feeds to avoid the exposure to plant poisoning while searching for feeds.
- ❖ Hay and other feed stuffs should be carefully inspected for contamination with potentially toxic weeds before feeding.
- ❖ Livestock owners should be advised to remove the toxic plants from the pasture land.
- ❖ Awareness creation should be made among the community on the practice of intensive livestock management system to minimize exposure of plant poisoning on the field.
- ❖ During early spring season, livestock owners should give due attention to the area where their livestock graze because many poisonous plants grow and appear on the grazing field in this season.
- ❖ It is recommended that detailed investigation should be performed to know the epidemiology of the poisonings caused by plants.

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