Most Common Poisonous Plants of Afghanistan and its Related Clinical Signs in Domestic Animals

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Abstract

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, having high mountains and high percentage (46%) of permanent pastures. Many types of plants including different species of poisonous grow in the country. Many species of wild and domestic animals have free access to these poisonous plants. In developed countries, poisoning is counted as one of the most important problem for animals, but in Afghanistan it is remained among inconsiderable illness as compared to infectious or metabolic diseases. Yearly, several outbreaks of unknown diseases occur in those areas which are rich of poisonous plants and cause serious economic consequences and human health concerns. The effects of poisonous plants on animals in Afghanistan and its common clinical signs have been remained unrecognized. In this review, we investigate the most common poisonous plants to animals present in Afghanistan and its related clinical signs for early diagnosis of plant poisoning in domestic animals. This review will help readers to distinguish poisonous plants, toxic parts, poisoning signs and the areas where they grow.

Keywords: Domestic animals, Poisonous plants, Clinical signs, Outbreaks.

1. Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked mountainous country encircled by Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, and China to the northeast [1]. In Afghanistan, most of the people are engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Among the total areas of Afghanistan; the arable area is 12 %, 3 % forest, 46 % is permanent pasture and the remaining is counted for mountains. Mostly, all the people who are engaged in agriculture keep animals for their daily expenses. The wide areas of permanent pasture provide good sources for animal husbandry [2]. Afghanistan is home of 5.3 million cattle, 13.2 million sheep, 7.7 million goats, 0.17 million camels, 0.171 million horse, 1.45
million donkeys and 11.9 million chicken. Different species of wild animals are also reported in Afghanistan that play key role in economy [2].

Different kinds of plants have been recognized in Afghanistan [3], including several species of poisonous plants. Poisonous plants cause severe economic losses to farmers as well as it consequences concerns for human health [4]. Poisoning counted as one of the serious problem for animals; but in Afghanistan it has remained among inconsiderable illness as compared to infectious or metabolic diseases. Several factors can be counted for this hypothesis such as lack of information regarding poisonous plants and their effects. However, most of the poisonous plants are bitter and unpalatable, but sometimes like lack of food or drought or mixed into forage and eaten by animals, cause poisoning. In Afghanistan, most of the animals especially sheep, goats, and camels are kept by nomads who travel in different seasons of the year to the different parts of the country. Such animals graze and eat different types of plants including poisonous one. The purpose of this review is to introduce the most common toxic plants existed in Afghanistan which can cause severe mortalities among animals and human health concerns. Common clinical signs of poisoned animals have also been covered. The plants which have been introduced in this article, had been searched from many different reliable sources such as books and articles published nationally or internationally.

2. Most Common Toxic Plants

2.1. Bracken fern

Bracken (Pteridium aquilinum) is one of the most common poisonous plants Figure1. A which is widely distributed in the world including Europe, South, and Central America and Southeast Asia. Poisoning by bracken has been reported in ruminant, non-ruminant as well as human [5-7]. Bracken is a fern belonging to the Dennstaedtiaceae family and consists of subspecies [8, 9], that has been recognized in several parts of Afghanistan [4]. Eating of this plant or its extract can cause poisoning in animals. Fern contains toxic materials like cyanogenic glycoside, thiaminase and other important chemical compounds that can cause anemia, hematuria, and neoplasia that leads sever production losses [10]. The toxin in the fern named Pat aquiloside is carcinogenic and cause bladder neoplasia, aplastic anemia, and hemorrhage. In non-ruminant like horses, it causes thiaminase depletion [11]. Carcinoma of digestive and urinary systems reported due to ingestion of fern by cattle [12, 13]. Chronic ingestion of fern leads to Enzootic hematuria [14], anemia, and increased body temperature, blindness [15], decreased bodyweight, ataxia, and recumbency. The untreated animal dies within a few days from showing clinical signs [16].

2.2. Calotropis procera

Calotropis procera (Figure1) is found in some parts of Afghanistan [4]. Calotropis is an organic irritant and poisonous contains active principles such as Uscharin, Calacatin and Calotoxin [17]. Calotropis gigantea and calotropis procera are the subspecies of calotropis which belong to the family of Asclepiadaceae. The milky juice of calotropis procera is more toxic than calotropis gigantea. All parts of this plant including the root, stem, and leaves are toxic [18]. The animal can be affected by different ways like ingestion of plants or direct injection of its products. Affected animals shows the clinical signs inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract, diarrhea, dehydration, and cardiac arrhythmias. The cardiac arrest also seen in animals due to the ingestion of calotropis [14].

2.3. Datura

Datura commonly known as thorn apple is the plant belongs to the family of Solanaceae. Datura has different species, all of them are poisonous to animals. Different species of Datura (Datura stramonium, Datura metaloideis, Datura arborea, and other species) have been recognized[19]. Some species of datura are present in Afghanistan such as Datura fastuosa, Datura innoxia (Figure1) and Datura stramonium (Figure1) [4]. Datura is regarded to be toxic to different species of animals especially horses. Datura is also toxic to humans and contains tropane alkaloids like hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and atropine [20]. Datura alkaloid’s work as anticholinergic and cause parasympatholytic action in animal, because they are counted as antagonists of acetylcholine receptors. After ingestion of feed by animals the Datura alkaloids are absorbed and as a result, gastrointestinal complications or death may occur[20]. Animals poisoned by Datura commonly show clinical signs like thirst, mydriais and visual disorders such as blindness. Respiratory paralysis, ataxia, and dry mucus membranes are other clinical signs in animals [21].

2.4. Ricinus communis

Ricinus communis (Figure1) poisoning caused by toxic principles of castor beans which is mostly found in temperate countries. The product of this plant (oil) is mostly used as anthelmintic and laxative. The castor oil itself is not toxic, because it does not have ricin. The cake of ricinus communis contains lectins like ricin 1 and ricin 2, which is the most powerful phytoxin. Ricin 2 is more toxic. Wide variation in the lethal dose of ricin in different species of animals have been reported [22]. After ingestion of cake or beans of castor, poisoning occur. All animals are susceptible to ricin toxicity, the horse is more than all [4]. Ricinus communis is found in some parts of Afghanistan that animal has free access to them [4]. Affected animals commonly show the clinical signs weakness, profuse watery diarrhea, dehydration with sunken eyes, and dilation of pupils,
depression, tachycardia, dyspnoea, and colic, that develop within 6–24 h after ingestion of ricin [23]. Vomiting, diarrhea, bloody diarrhea and abdominal pain can also be seen [24].

2.5. Locoweed

Locoweed poisoning is one of the major concerns in the Western United States and mostly widespread plant in that region. Poisoning is caused by the ingestion of some poisonous species of this plant called Astragalus and Oxytropis [25]. Several hundred species of these plants are existed. The toxic species is divided into three categories such as selenium-containing, nitrotoxin containing and loccoism containing plants. The existed toxin in these plants is named Swinsonine that was recognized in Australia. Swinsonine interferes with the activities of a cellular enzyme called mannosidases, which help in the processing of oligosaccharides and glycoproteins [26]. Several species (toxic and non-toxic) of Astragalus and Oxytropis that cause locoweed poisoning in animals have been recognized in different parts of Afghanistan [4] (Table 1). Animals that poisoned by locoweed mostly show subclinical and chronic sings of diseases like anorexia, emaciation, fertility disorders, changing of animal behavior, depression, cardiovascular disorders, and nervous sings, variation in the clinical signs among animals can also be seen [27].

2.6. Nerium Oleander

Nerium oleander (Nerium indicum) is a poisonous plant (Figure 1) belonging to the family of Apocynaceae with narrow and long leaves. This plant is found in many countries including USA, Mediterranean areas [28] as well as in some parts of Afghanistan [4]. All parts of the plant are poisonous to humans and animals. Nerium indicum contains cardiac glycosides named oleandrin, digoxigenin, neriin, folinerin, and rosagenin [19, 29]. Inhalation smoke of burned plant or ingestion of this plant or its extract can cause severe effects on the body [29, 30]. Poisoned animals show clinical signs of sever inflammation of the digestive system, abdominal pain, sweating, and weakness. These sings occur immediately after ingestion of the plant. Cardiac disorder like arrhythmias is another sign of Nerium indicum poisoning [19].

2.7. Aconitum

Different species of Aconitum plant have been recognized in the world [29]. Among them, Aconitum rotundifolium (Figure 1) have been observed in different parts of Afghanistan (Table 1) [4]. All parts of Aconitum especially the roots and leaves are toxic [31]. Animals poisoned by Aconitum show clinical signs of central nervous systems disorders, abnormalities in digestive systems like gastroenteritis and abdominal pain, the animal may die due to the development of cardiac abnormalities [32]. Hypotension, depression, conduction disturbance, tachycardia are other signs that are observed in poisoned animals [33].

2.8. Adonis

Different species of Adonis like Adonis Aestivalis, A. scrobiculata and A. Turkestanica (Figure 1) are existed in different parts of Afghanistan Table 1 [4], belonging to Ranunculaceae family, which is unpalatable. Poisoning of animals by this plant has been reported in horses [34], pigs [35] and sheep [36]. Adonis species contain glycosides resembling digitalis and other toxins present in oleander [37]. Clinical signs of Adonis poisoning in animals, especially in horses include disorders of the gastrointestinal tract, abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea and decreased gut motility [37]. The severity of clinical signs depends on the amount of ingested plant [29].

Several other toxic plants which are not very common are also exist in different parts of Afghanistan. Their names, family names, local names, toxic parts, toxic materials, clinical signs and places which grow in Afghanistan are listed in Table 1.
Figure 1.
Photos of the poisonous plants that can be found in Afghanistan. A: Pteridium aquilinum, B: Calotropis procera, C: Datura inoxia, D: D. stramonium, E: Ricinus communis, F: Nerium indicum, G: Aconitum rotundifolium, H: Adonis aestivalis, I: A. scrobiculata, J: A. turkestanicus, K: Ranunculus afghanicus, L: R. arvensis, M: R. longicaulis, N: R. palchellus, O: R. sceleratus, P: Catharanthus roseus, Q: Asclepias curassavica, R: Cynanchum acutum, S: Periploca aphylla, T: Senecio glaucus, U: S. vulgaris, V: Sambucus wightiana, W: Citrullus colocynthis, X: Euphorbia boissieriana, Y: E. cyrtoyellowa, Z: E. helioscopia, AA: Atropa acuminata, AB: Hyoscyamus niger, AC: Solanum nigrum [4, 29, 38, 39].
Table 1.
List of poisonous plants present in Afghanistan, there places they grown, its toxins present in the plant, toxic parts of the plant and their local names [4].

| No | Toxic plants* | Family | Places * | Local name* | Toxins | Toxic part | Common clinical signs |
|----|---------------|--------|----------|-------------|--------|------------|----------------------|
| 1  | *Pteridium aquilinum* (Figure 1) | Polypodiaceae | NUR | NA | Ptaquiloside | All parts | Anemia, hematuria, neoplasia, hemorrhage, decreased body weight, ataxia, enzootic hematuria and blindness [10-16]. |
| 2  | *Calotropis procera* (Figure 1) | Asclepiadaceae | E, SE | Spelmai | Alkaloids | All parts | Dehydration, diarrhea, cardiac arrhythmias and inflammation of gastrointestinal tract, [14]. |
| 3  | *Datura innoxia* (Figure 1) *D. stramonium* (Figure 1) | Solanaceae | NE, C NW, SE, E, | Datura | Alkaloids | All parts | Thirst, mydriasis, blindness, respiratory paralysis, ataxia, and dry mucus membranes [21]. |
| 4  | *Ricinus communis* (Figure 1) | Euphorbiaceae | SW, Hari Rud, JLB | Kastror oil | Ricin | Seeds | Weakness, sunken eye, watery diarrhea, depression, tachycardia and vomiting [24]. |
| 5  | *Nerium indicum* (Figure 1) | Apocynaceae | E | Gul-e Gandiri | Oleandrin | All parts | Bradycardia and ventricular fibrillation [45]. |
| 6  | *Aconitum rotundifolium* (Figure 1) | Ranunculaceae | E, NE | NA | Alkaloids | Root | Weakness, ataxia, respiratory distress and diarrhea [47]. |
| 7  | *Adonis aestivalis* (Figure 1) *A. scrobiculata* (Figure 1) *A. turkestanicus* (Figure 1) | Ranunculaceae | SW, SE, E, NE All Parts of AFG NE | NA | Cardiac glycosides | All part | Abdominal pain, bloody diarrhea, decrease gut motility and cardiac arrhythmias [29, 37]. |
| 8  | *Ranunculus afghanicus* (Figure 1) *R. arvensis* (Figure 1) *R. longicaulis* (Figure 1) *R. pulchellus* (Figure 1) *R. sceleratus* (Figure 1) | Ranunculaceae | NW, E, SE, NE C NW, SE, NE, SW E, NE Wakan NW, E, NE | NA | Protoanemonin | Sap | Colic, depression, salivation, blindness, blood stain urine, muscle trembling, twitching and discoloration of cow’s milk [50]. |
| 9  | *Catharanthus roseus* (Figure 1) | Apocynaceae | Cultural | NA | Alkaloids | All parts | Electrolytes imbalance, dehydration, severe abdominal pain, profuse diarrhea and cardiovascular collapse [52]. |
| 10 | *Asclepias curassavica* (Figure 1) | Asclepiadaceae | All part of AFG | NA | Cardenolides | All parts | Vertigo, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach cramps, and arrhythmia [54]. |
| 11 | *Cynanchum acutum* (Figure 1) | Asclepiadaceae | Most part of AFG | NA | Alkaloids | All part | Hypersensitivity, incoordination and central nervous system disorders have been reported [56]. |
| No. | Species | Family | Distribution | Part(s) | Chemicals | Clinical Signs |
|-----|---------|--------|--------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| 12  | *Periploca aphylla* (Figure1) | Asclepiadaceae | SW, SE, E | NA | Alkaloids | No reports about its clinical signs of this plant are available |
| 13  | *Senecio glaucus* (Figure1)  
*Senecio vulgaris* (Figure1) | Asteraceae | All regions of S-Afg-E | Pir Kah | Alkaloids | All parts[57] | Diarrhea, depression, ill thrift, prolapsed rectum, edema, ascites and head pressing [58]. |
| 14  | *Sambucus wightiana* (Figure1) | Caprifoliaceae | E, NUR | NA | Glycosides | All parts[29] | Abdominal pain, lethargy, sweating and in severe cases coma and collapse of cardiovascular occur[29]. |
| 15  | *Citrullus colocynthis* (Figure1) | Cucurbitaceae | SW, S, SE, E | Tarbooz-e Abujehl | Alkaloids | All parts[59] | Dullness, ruffled hair, decreased body weight gains and feed efficiency reported in rodent [60]. |
| 16  | *Euphorbia boissieriana* (Figure1)  
*E. cyrtophylla* (Figure1)  
*E. helioscopia* (Figure1) | Euphorbiaceae | N, NE, E, C (Nuristan)  
In most regions, weed | NA | Alkaloids | All parts[59] | Irritation of the skin and mucous membranes, visual disorders and digestive problems [61]. |
| 17  | *Atropa acuminata* (Figure1) | Solanaceae | E | NA | Alkaloids | All parts[62] | Dry mouth, dysphagia, dysphonia, tachycardia and urinary retention [29]. |
| 18  | *Hyoscyamus niger* (Figure1) | Solanaceae | N, NE, E | NA | Alkaloids | All parts [63] | Anorexia, dry muzzle, meiosis and tenesmus [64]. |
| 19  | *Solanum nigrum* (Figure1) | Solanaceae | NW, SE, E, NE, C | NA | Alkaloids | All parts [30] | Vomiting, abdominal pain, nausea and diarrhea [29]. |
3. Conclusion

In conclusion, poisoning is counted as one of the most critical problems in animals that can cause severe mortalities. Besides keeping the animals by farmers, most of the animals are hept by nomads in Afghanistan who travel to different parts of the country and access to all kinds of plants that grow in pastures. In this review, we have introduced many types of poisonous plants grow in different parts of Afghanistan, there local names, photos, toxins they have, and toxic parts of the plants. Besides, the clinical signs of poisoned animals which are very important for the veterinarian to diagnose poisoning have been discussed too.

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