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Agriculture Protection Board
Advisory Leaflet No. 48
June 1979
Agdex No. 647
CP 6020/7/79—10m

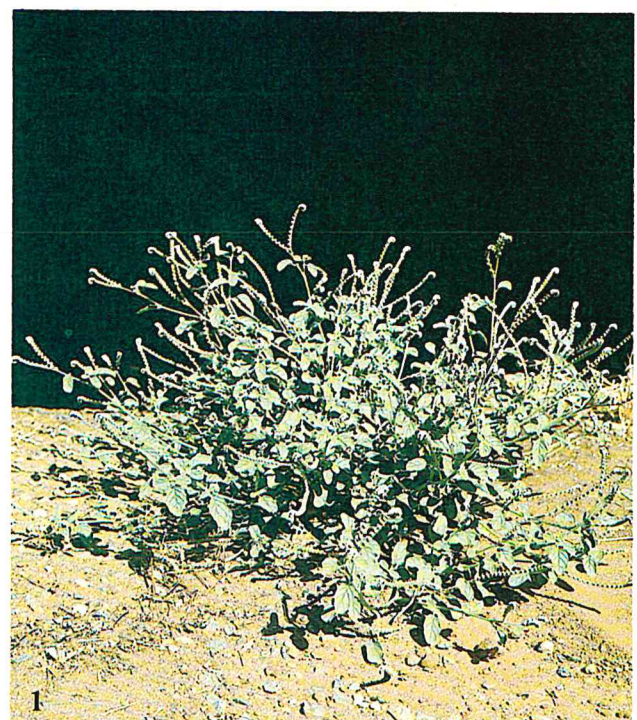
HELIOTROPE



2



3



1 Mature plant

2 Flower spike

3 Seedling

HELIOTROPE

Heliotrope (Common heliotrope or Caterpillar weed)

(*Heliotropium europaeum* L.) is a member of the borage family (Boraginaceae). Other related weeds are Paterson's curse, Corn gromwell and Yellow burr weed (*Amsinckia*). Introduced accidentally from the Mediterranean region, it is a major weed problem in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. There are scattered outbreaks in the Perth metropolitan area, wheatbelt and pastoral districts of Western Australia.

Heliotrope is a declared plant (Noxious weed) in Western Australia. It is a potentially important weed in W.A. and all efforts should be taken to eradicate it.

Heliotrope, like Paterson's curse, contains the poisonous alkaloid Pyrrolizidine. Large amounts of heliotrope may be eaten by stock

because it is a summer growing annual and is frequently the only green feed available. British breed sheep which are less discriminating in their grazing habits than Merinos, are more likely to succumb to Heliotrope poisoning. Cattle are thought to be more susceptible to Heliotrope poisoning than sheep. Grain contamination with Heliotrope seed has been linked with poultry deaths.

Ecology:

Heliotrope is a summer growing annual, growing rapidly after rain and able to tolerate drought conditions. It rapidly flowers and produces viable seeds. The large seeds may remain viable but dormant for several years. Dispersion is by seed. These may be carried internally by animals or on wool, vehicles and machinery, or in chaff and grain.

Description:

Heliotrope is an erect, strongly rooted plant growing up to 0.3 m tall. It has grey-green, oval leaves arranged alternately on thick stalks. Leaves and stems are covered in coarse, white hairs (1). The flowers are white, and if moisture conditions allow, numerous, forming a slender coiled spike (2). The seed consists of four nutlets per flower, each 2-2½ m long. The outer surface is rough with a smooth, concave inner surface.

Prompt action is needed to eradicate isolated patches of Heliotrope and to prevent the weed from getting established in a new area.

Suspect plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board, Telephone Perth (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the Agriculture Protection Board or the Department of Agriculture.