

## **Environmentally Very Dangerous!**

Fairly strong words about a plant that produces pretty yellow flowers but ragwort (*Senecio Jacobaea*) is extremely dangerous to humans and animals.

The toxic properties in ragwort are made up of several different pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which are all poisonous to horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs and human beings. Ragwort causes more losses to the livestock industry than all other plants put together.

Most worrying of all is that the PA (pyrrolizidine alkaloids) poisons have been found in eggs, grain, milk and honey. Research into PAs has been shown to cause cancer in rats and other laboratory animals. (Ref. Kinghorn, *Carcinogenic and Cocarcinogenic Toxins*, 247-248). Kinghorn goes on to say "Alkaloids of *S.jacobaea* have been found in honey produced from its nectar (Deinzer et al., 1977) and in milk from cows grazing on this species (Dickinson et al., 1976). PAs therefore present a significant carcinogenic risk to humans and livestock." Last year a lot of West Country beekeepers had to throw away their honey as it showed high levels of PAs. The bees feeding on the nectar of the ragwort plant flowers caused this. Researchers have also found that PAs cause birth defects and abortions. The liver damage caused by PAs is irreversible, and there is no known treatment for ragwort poisoning.

Ragwort is easy to recognise when growing. The plant produces a rosette of green ragged edge leaves in May, then grows into a 3' upright plant with woody slightly red stems. It produces a large head of bright yellow flowers with a daisy like petal in late July/August.

We can prevent the risks to our food chain and the poisoning of our animals, if we all work together to clear ragwort from our beautiful county. Before ragwort flowers it responds well to spraying with a herbicide. Once it flowers all plants must then be pulled up and put into sacks and incinerated before it is allowed to seed. **ALWAYS WEAR GLOVES WHEN HANDLING RAGWORT.**

The British Horse Society is organising a major ragwort clearance programme across Oxfordshire this summer. This is a project that any one can help with, whether it is advising us of areas where you have found ragwort growing or simply pulling up the plants as you find them while out walking. To do that all you will need are your gloves and a bag to put the plant into, it's as simple as that!

If you want to safeguard the environment for future generations and care about animals, please join our campaign and become involved in this project.

For advice, leaflets, or to offer help please contact the BHS welfare officer Miss D M Hams on 01993 702844.