HISTORICAL

?- 1876: Pastoralists and botanists

The Khoe (or Khoi) name recorded by Thunberg clearly indicates that the Khoe recognised a plant intoxication, nenta.

An interesting reference by Louis Trichardt in 1838 indicated knowledge of a disease condition as "een soort van nintas" when referring to mortalities of sheep. This was probably heartwater but Trichardt was considering the clinical format of the disease.

Before 1876 references to plants reportedly associated with nenta were identified by botanists who usually acted on reports by farmers and rarely saw the disease. Their reports are contained in a commission assigned to investigate diseases in cattle and sheep published in 1877.

Cape sheep were replaced by fine woolled sheep and the indigenous goats introduced into the south-western and eastern Cape were being replaced by mohair-producing goats. The economically significant importance of wool and hence concerns about factors affecting wool production lead to this Commission and the appointment of the first Colonial Veterinary Surgeon, William Catton Branford in 1876.

The Report read: “There is a disease called “Rita” which is very destructive to goats. It affects them in a way that seems to indicate paralysis of the nervous system”. Prof MacOwan, inter alia, had heard that this disease was ascribed to Lessertia annularis.

In the Addendum MacOwan referred to ‘nenta’ ascribed to L. annularis.