

# Spotlight on Agriculture

Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training, Private Bag 13184, Windhoek

No 115 January 2010

## TRADITIONAL USES OF SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE APOCYNACEAE FAMILY IN NAMIBIA

### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to highlight the importance of some *Apocynaceae* species in Namibia with respect to traditional knowledge. In this article, twelve of the most common *Apocynaceae* species have been tabulated. Their uses and conservation statuses are given. It has been noted that a number of species in this family serve as sources of food while others have medicinal and ornamental values. A few species in certain genera are used as poison for arrows and certain species are associated with ritual beliefs.

### INTRODUCTION

The *Apocynaceae* family comprises at least 175 Namibian species belonging to 51 genera. These plants can be shrubs, woody or herbaceous plants. They are perennial with watery or milky latex. The family is rich in alkaloids and some members are toxic. A variety of species in this family have a range of traditional uses. Several species are also widely grown ornamentally.

Some of the plants develop tubers, which are sources of food and water to people in rural areas, whilst others are used as a poison for arrows. Some species again are known to have medicinal values, which render them crucially important to rural communities.

Traditional beliefs are also associated with some plants, for instance, certain plants are thought to invoke bad luck if encountered during hunting trips, while others are thought to bestow good fortune if seen while hunting. The genus *Hoodia* is of particular commercial importance today, as a remedy for obesity. *Hoodia* species are still used by San, Nama, Damara and Topnaar people, both as a medicinal remedy and as a food and water substitute.

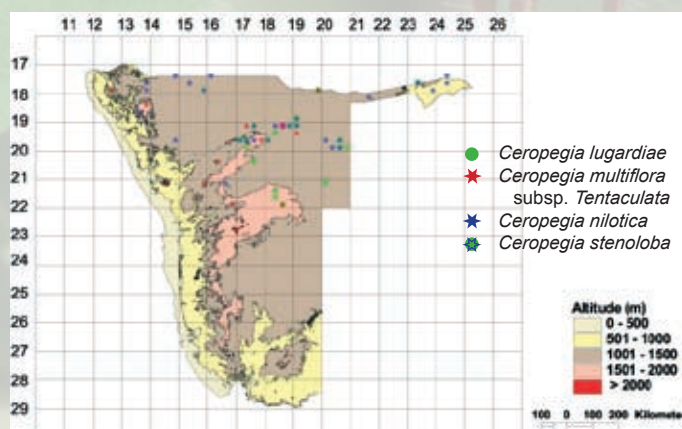
### DISCUSSION

Traditional uses of selected members of the *Apocynaceae* family in Namibia:

#### 1. *Ceropegia lugardiae*



Photo: Ben Strohbach



Distribution map of *Ceropegia* species

Uses: Powder is applied to the back and other ailments. Powder is also rubbed into skin incisions on the forehead to improve success in hunting.

#### 2. *Ceropegia multiflora* subsp. *tentaculata*

Uses: Tubers are highly valued as a source of nourishment. The pale yellow flesh is juicy and tasty.

#### 3. *Ceropegia nilotica*

Uses: Bunches of fleshy white roots are eaten raw as a crisp, providing a juicy refreshment on hot days. It forms part of the diet of the Ju/'hoansi people.

4. *Ceropegia purpurascens*  
Uses: The tubers are baked in the ashes before they are eaten.
5. *Ceropegia stenoloba*  
Uses: Tubers are eaten raw or roasted in hot ash.
6. *Orbea huillensis* subsp. *huillensis*  
Uses: The roots and stem are edible. This plant is also good for people with dental problems.

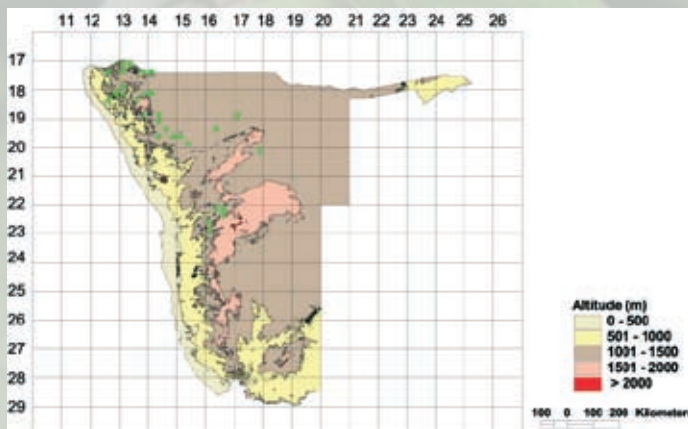
It is thought to bring bad luck if seen during hunting trips.

7. *Orbea lugardii*  
Uses: The leaves are edible, with a lettuce flavour.
8. *Orbea maculata*  
Uses: The leaves are edible, with a lettuce flavour.
9. *Orbea namaquensis*  
Uses: The leaves are edible, with a slightly bitter taste. The flowers are also edible.

10. *Adenium boehmianum*



Photo: Silke Rügheimer



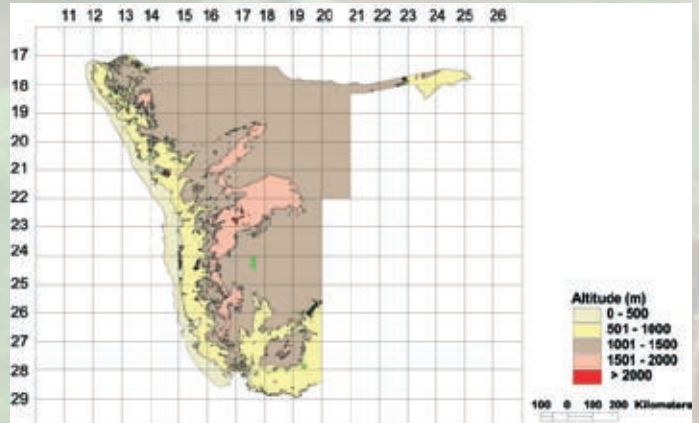
Distribution map of *Adenium boehmianum*

Uses: The sap is used as poison for arrows.

11. *Adenium oleifolium*



Photo: Herta Kolberg



Distribution map of *Adenium oleifolium*

Uses: A concoction of the root is used as a tonic, especially for gastric disturbances, and as a remedy for fever. Ointment made from this plant can be applied to snake and scorpion bites.

12. *Strophanthus kombe*

Uses: Well-known as a poison for arrows.

The conservation status of the species:

Species	Status
<i>Ceropegia lugardiae</i>	Lower risk, least concern
<i>Ceropegia multiflora</i> subsp. <i>tentaculata</i>	Lower risk, least concern
<i>Ceropegia nilotica</i>	Lower risk, least concern
<i>Ceropegia purpurascens</i>	Near threatened
<i>Ceropegia stenoloba</i>	Near threatened
<i>Orbea huillensis huillensis</i>	Not assessed before, not evaluated
<i>Orbea lugardii</i>	Data deficient
<i>Orbea maculata</i>	Data deficient
<i>Orbea namaquensis</i>	Not assessed before, not evaluated
<i>Adenium boehmianum</i>	Lower risk, least concern
<i>Adenium oleifolium</i>	Near threatened
<i>Strophanthus kombe</i>	Data deficient

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the curator of the Windhoek herbarium, Dr. E.G. Kwembeya, for the idea of publishing this information and for his comments. He is also grateful to all NBRI staff and associate staff members for their contributions.

**Author:** David Aiyambo.  
**Affiliations of authors:** National Botanical Research Institute, Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Private Bag 13184, Windhoek, Namibia.  
**Content Editor:** Paul van der Merwe, Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Private Bag 13184, Windhoek, Namibia.  
**Language Editor:** Celia Mendelsohn, celia@scouts.org.na.