

*Acacia erioloba*= *Acacia giraffae*

## Camel-thorn

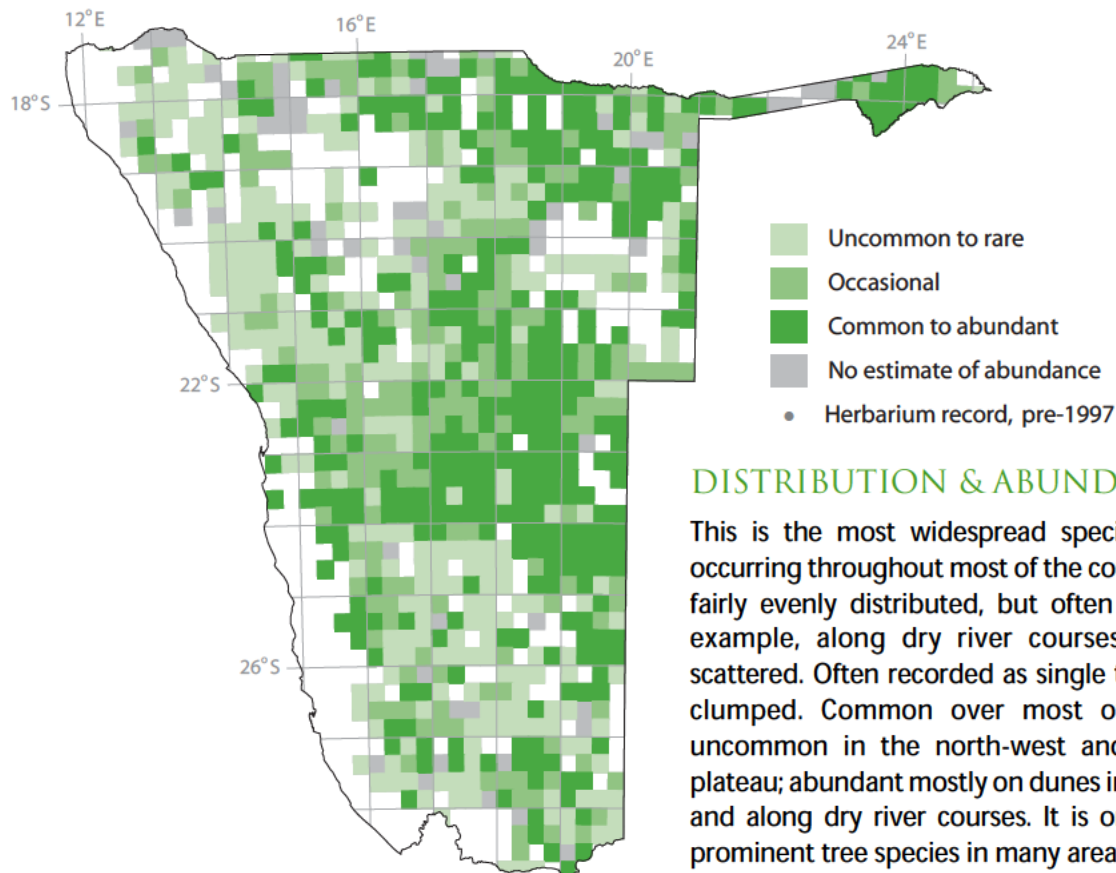
Kameeldoring (A); Kameldornbaum (G); omumbonde (H); ||ganab (K); muhoto (L); omuthiya (Od); omuonde (Ok); muntu (Rum)

[3,362 records from 889 (83%) squares]



A tree with a distinctive appearance when old; canopy spreading, sometimes in sections. TRUNK **gnarled and often misshapen**. BARK **dark grey and fissured**; young branchlets red-brown and **zig-zag**. THORNS paired, straight, white, sometimes **inflated at the base**. LEAVES with 2–5 pinna pairs and 8–15 leaflet pairs per pinna. FLOWERS **golden-yellow balls**. FRUIT a **woody, grey, velvety pod; often shaped like a human ear**.

Flowers and pods are conspicuous. Unmistakable as an adult, but may be confused with other straight-thorned *Acacia* species when young.

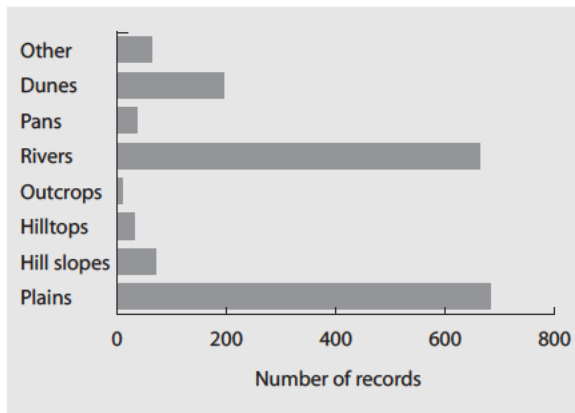


## DISTRIBUTION &amp; ABUNDANCE

This is the most widespread species in Namibia, occurring throughout most of the country. Generally fairly evenly distributed, but often localised – for example, along dry river courses – sometimes scattered. Often recorded as single trees, less often clumped. Common over most of the country; uncommon in the north-west and south-central plateau; abundant mostly on dunes in the south-east and along dry river courses. It is one of the most prominent tree species in many areas, especially the central-west, central- and south-east and along the Omuramba Omatako

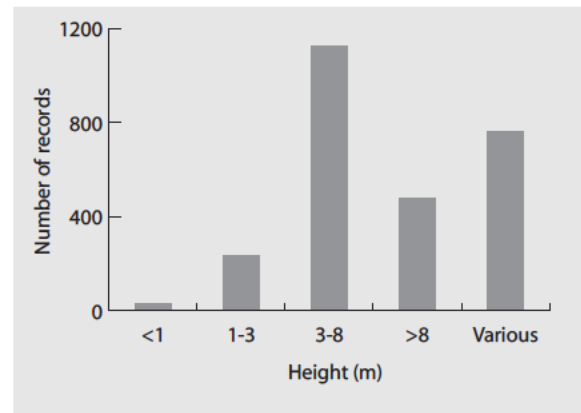
## HABITAT

Occurs in a wide range of vegetation types, including woodland, riverine forest, thornbush and woodland savanna, shrubland, wooded and shrubby grassland and island thickets on termitaria. Found in almost all habitats, but most often on plains, along dry river courses, on sand hummocks and dunes; in the Cuvelai it is most abundant around pans; often on hill slopes in the central highlands. Mostly grows on sand, but also on clay, gravel and stony or rocky ground, including calcrete, granite koppies, sandstone, dolomite, quartzite and mica schist.



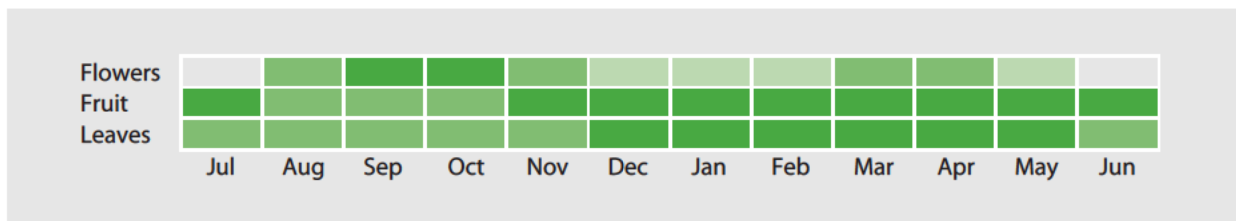
## GROWTH FORM

Mainly trees (88% of records) which are 3–8 m high, but often over 8 m, especially along riverbeds and on floodplains. On rocky outcrops, *A. erioloba* grows mainly as shrubs of 1–3 m high. In the central and southern regions, often growing as stands of plants not exceeding 3 m in height; low thickets reported in 2018CD. Mixed stands of young, shrubby forms and taller trees ranging in height of up to 8 m or more were recorded in many areas, especially in the eastern half of the country where the species is most abundant. However, recruitment in general does not appear to be very good, judging by the low number of young plants in relation to mature ones.



## ANNUAL CYCLE

**FLOWERS** August until May, with the main peak in September and a second, smaller peak in March/April; in some years the second peak was as early as January. There is a great deal of variability from year to year and area to area – see box below. **FRUIT** present all year; peaks in January, fewest in September/October; young fruit mostly October to December, ripe fruit January to July. There was great variability in the number of pods from month to month and area to area. **LEAVES** throughout the year, with slight drop in winter, especially August when there are many bare trees; new leaves appear from August to October.



## GENERAL

*Acacia erioloba* has many uses. The wood is used for firewood, building material, fence poles, making implements; the seeds are used as a 'coffee bean'; various parts of the tree are used medicinally; and the tree provides generous shade. Birds recorded nesting in the tree include the Sociable Weaver, White-

browed Sparrow-weaver, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Tawny Eagle, various owls and others; the holes in the trunk and cavities under the bark are used by a wide range of small animals, including birds; fruit bats and monitor lizards have been recorded sheltering in these trees in Ongwediva. Both wild and domestic animals browse the leaves, flowers, young shoots and pods, which are highly nutritious. Pods are collected by farmers for fodder and as ingredients for licks. In some areas, the trees have been damaged by elephant or giraffe.

Although not regarded as an invasive species, *Acacia erioloba* was recorded encroaching along the road in 1918DA, and forming thickets in 2018CD. This species seems to be susceptible to parasites such as *Tapinanthus* and *Plicosepalus*. Along the Nossob, Olifants and Auob rivers it is being outcompeted by *Prosopis*. Large numbers of dead or dying trees were recorded, mainly from the central areas, which could be a result of drought.

There are various places in Namibia named after this tree in different languages, e.g. Omusati Region.

## CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Although widespread and common, this species is very slow growing and does not regenerate rapidly. Often many young seedlings are found after good rains, such as in Sossusvlei (2415CB) in May 1998, but many of these seedlings do not survive long. Of concern is the number of pods that are collected and removed by people for their livestock in some areas, reducing the seeds available for germination and the replacement of lost individuals. Recruitment seems to be rather poor overall. *Acacia erioloba* is much sought after for firewood and is subject to over-exploitation. In places, such as the Camel-thorn Forest south of Rehoboth, it is being seriously threatened as a result of this. The camel-thorn is protected by forestry legislation.

### Flowering patterns

There were some interesting regional flowering patterns of *Acacia erioloba*. Although flowering started in August throughout the country, it was most prolific in the north-east and around Grootfontein. In every region, flowering peaked in September/October. There were scattered records of flowering from February to May throughout the country, but the second peak was most noticeable in March/April in the south as well as the central- and north-west. The central Namib had a very broad flowering period. Although the data are too few to draw any firm conclusions – especially for the Cuvelai area, and the north- and south-west – it seems that flowering starts earliest in areas with the highest rainfall and highest spring temperatures, and continues later in the year in areas with a rainfall peak in March (see Mendelsohn *et al.* 2002, page 88).

Flowering period was recorded across the country as about nine months. However, the flowering period of individual trees was much shorter, generally only one or two months. On farms Gornab (2318CB) and Natalia (2118CA), where five-years data were collected, *A. erioloba* had a short, fixed flowering period, from August to October, but always in September on both farms. On farm Quinta (2219AD), flowering also always occurred in September for three years. In Windhoek (2217CA), *A. erioloba* flowered mostly in September and October. Far longer flowering periods were recorded in the area of Rössing Mine than on most farms.

On other farms, flowering varied every year. The variability in flowering was illustrated in October 1998 when flowering was over in most parts of the country, but only starting in squares 2115 and 2116. Response to rain was observed in degree square 2415 in May 1998 when flowers were noted on some trees after a shower on 26 March.

This second flowering seems to be unique to the drier parts of Namibia, as it does not occur in Zimbabwe (Timberlake *et al.* 1999) and does not appear to occur in South Africa (Smit 1999). It would be interesting to study the phenology of this plant further.