

Acacia mellifera

A **V-shaped shrub** or small tree with a rounded canopy. BRANCHLETS **reddish-brown with white lenticels**. THORNS small, paired, recurved. LEAVES with **few, relatively large, rounded leaflets**. FLOWERS creamy-white. FRUIT a thin and papery pod with a pointed apex.

Flowers are conspicuous, pods may be overlooked when green. There are two subspecies in Namibia, which are characterised by their leaves and flowers.

A. mellifera subsp. *detinens*

Swarthaak

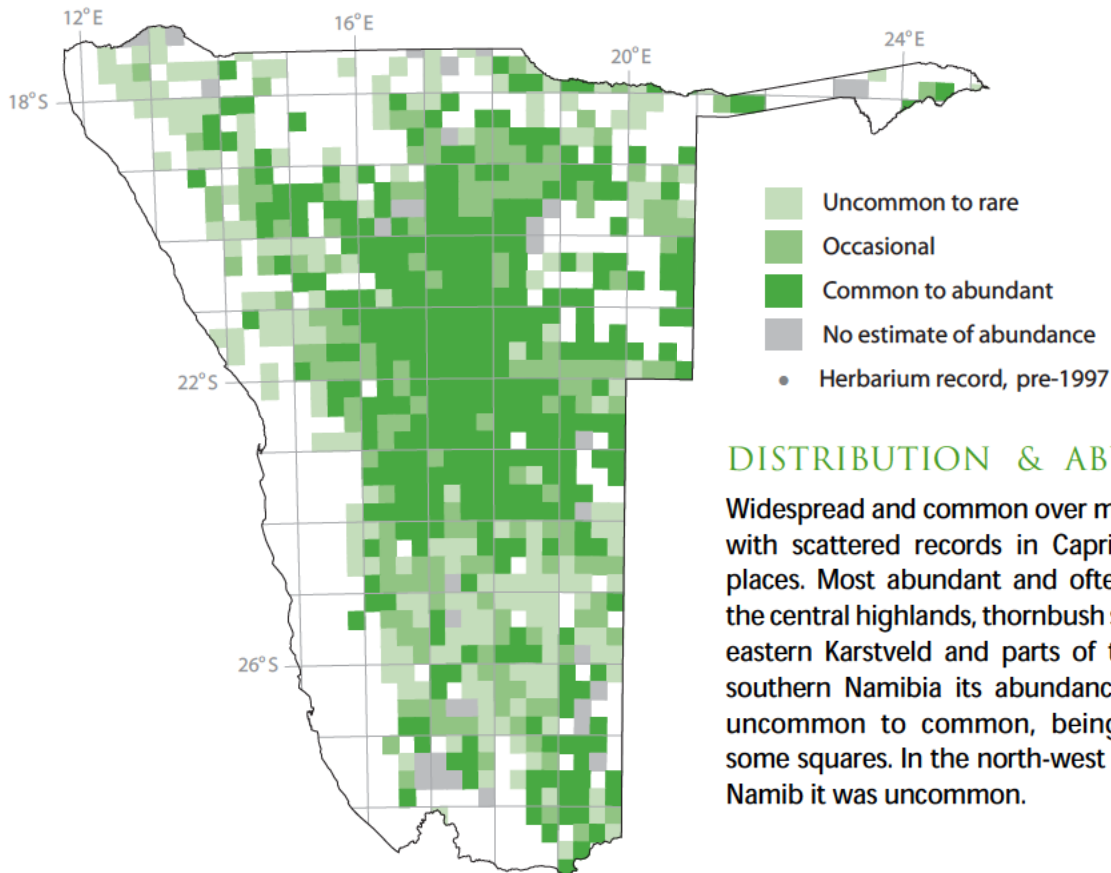
Black-thorn acacia (E); hakiesbos (A); omusaona (H); Inoes (K); kankata (Rk, Rum)

[2,835 records from 751 (70%) squares]



THORNS **extremely sharp, very hooked, black**. LEAVES usually with 3–4 pinna pairs, each pinna with 1–2 leaflet pairs. FLOWERS appear to be in round balls (actually very reduced spikes).

From a distance may be confused with *A. senegal* due to its shape. Leaflets are similar to those of *Albizia anthelmintica*. This is by far the more common and widespread of the two subspecies.

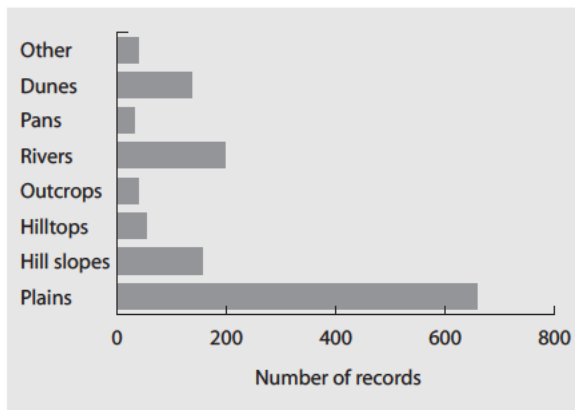


DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE

Widespread and common over most of Namibia, with scattered records in Caprivi; localised in places. Most abundant and often dominant in the central highlands, thornbush savanna, south-eastern Karstveld and parts of the Kalahari. In southern Namibia its abundance ranged from uncommon to common, being dominant in some squares. In the north-west and the central Namib it was uncommon.

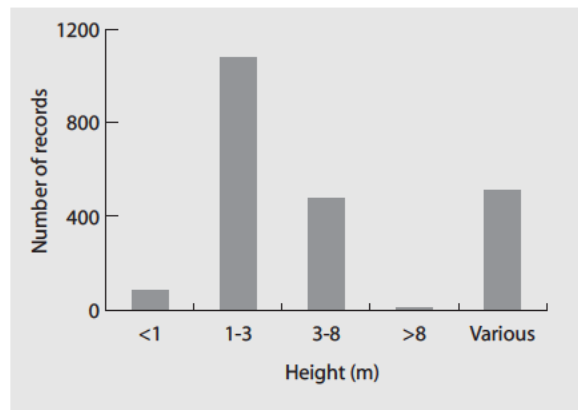
HABITAT

All habitat types, but most often on plains, where it ranged from uncommon to abundant, as it did on hill slopes. In dry rivers it was uncommon to common, whereas in dunes it was common to uncommon. Those recorded as being in a variety of habitats were common to abundant. Found on a variety of substrates including sand, calcrete, rocky, gravel and stony substrates and sometimes clay.



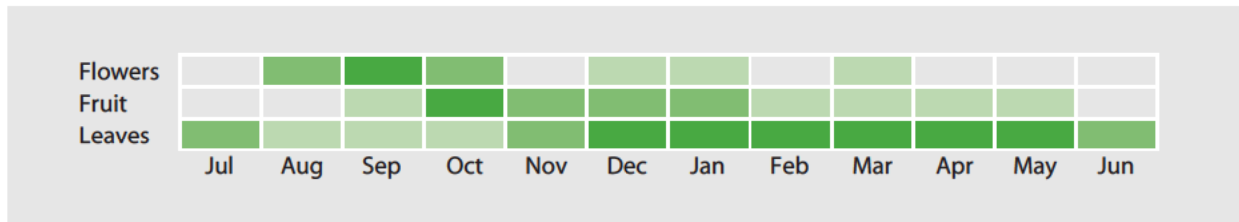
GROWTH FORM

Mostly a shrub (60% of records) up to 3 m high (42% of records). Sometimes a tree (17%) or mixed stands of shrubs and trees up to 8 m (23%). The majority of those in the 3–8-m category were across the north of the country. Trees over 8 m were rare (2% of records), and found scattered throughout the country. Stands of mixed height classes found throughout the country, but predominantly in the north-east. The highest proportions of low (less than 1m high) populations were in the south-west and the Cuvelai. Thicket-forming in places.



ANNUAL CYCLE

FLOWERS mainly August to October, with a peak in September, extending until April some years, but much less profusely. There is a lot of seasonal and regional variability – see box below. FRUIT September to May, though found occasionally throughout the year; ripe fruit November to April. LEAVES were recorded on some individuals all year round; however, in winter most plants were bare, with young leaves being recorded from September to December; old leaves were recorded from March to October.



Flowering patterns

The variability between areas is shown by plants which 'bloomed particularly profusely' in 2217AC in 1997/98 (HUB1) and 'no flowers or seeds this season' in 2116DB for the same season (AUS1). Flowering intensity also varied from season to season. In 2000 when rains were very good throughout the country, a 'good flowering season' was noted for 2318CB (FOR1) and 'masses of flowers' in 2219AD (SIL1). In 1916D in August 1998 there were only occasional flowers due to lack of rain (HOB1) and in 1917BC they 'did not flower or bear fruit due to drought in 1998/9' (BAS1). Some years there were 'exceptionally many pods' (November 2000 from 2217DA (HOF1)) and other years there were few.

GENERAL

An aggressive, invasive species, that has encroached many overgrazed areas. In areas that have been treated with herbicide, it appears to be slow to invade again, and this has been attributed to competition with grass (BES1); in other areas it has been subject to extensive bush-clearing activities and harvesting for charcoal production. The fungus *Phoma glomerata* causes natural die-back in many areas, and is most effective in areas of heavy soils, due to moisture stress, causing die-back by as much as 80% over five years (BES1). Some farmers have tried to 'control it by using fungi, which has been successful in some areas' (PIE1). There were also several records of dead plants, mainly from the central parts of the country, but also from the south.

The leaves are commonly eaten by caterpillars; also browsed by dassies, giraffe, springbok, gemsbok, black-faced impala, elephant and rhino. Insects are attracted to its sweetly scented flowers and it is thought to be a good 'bee species' and is reported that the flowers produce good honey, more so in the omurambas than on the limestone (HOB1). Weavers and other birds nest in the trees.

The gum of this plant is edible and highly valued; it is usually harvested in winter. Pods may be eaten in times of food shortage. Dethorned branchlets are used for cleaning teeth; in the Herero culture the roots are used to curdle milk. Various plant parts are used medicinally. The wood is used for fence droppers and poles; branches are used for fencing gardens and cattle enclosures.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Of concern because of its effect on other species.