

Berchemia discolor

Bird Plum / Ombe

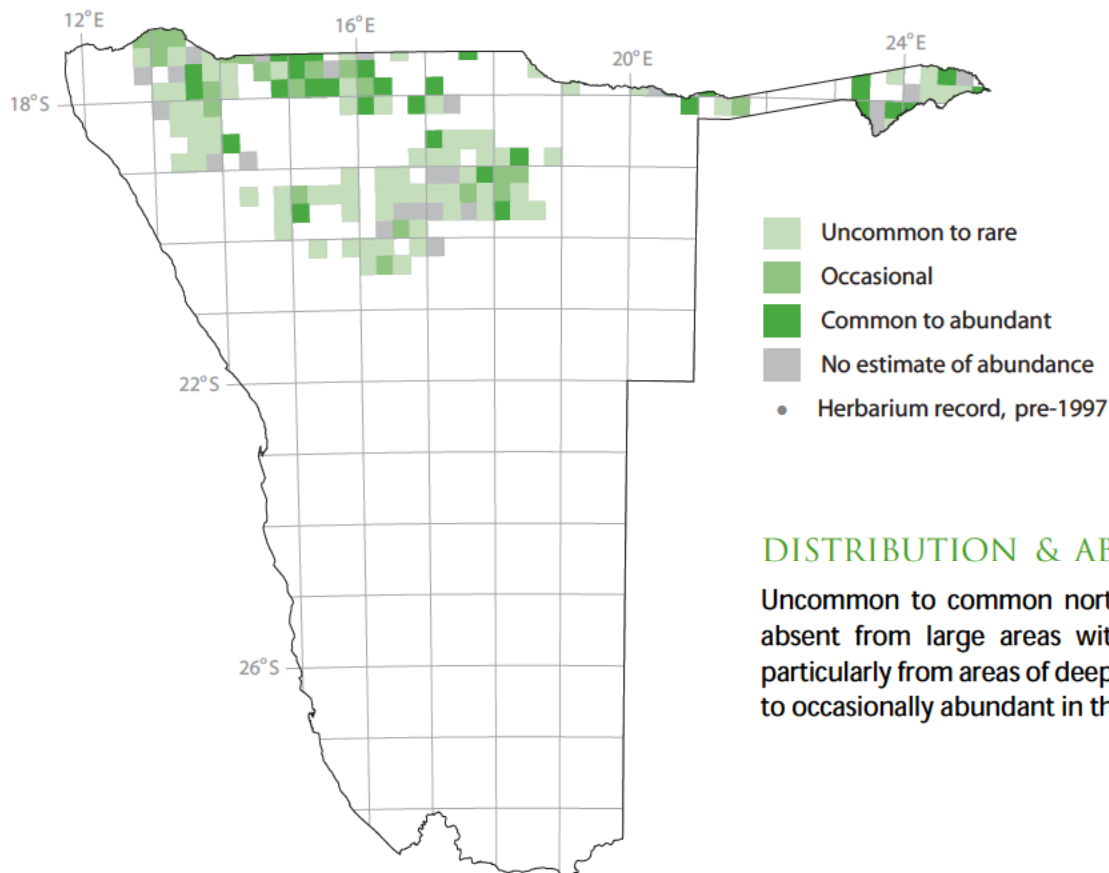
Bruinivoor (A); Wilde Dattel (G); omuve (H, Od); fhûin (K); mukalu, muzinzila (L); eembe (= fruit, Ok); nombe (Rk); mukerete (Rum)

[394 records from 152 (14%) squares]



A medium-sized to large tree with a rounded crown. BARK dark grey, rough, fissured. LEAVES simple, **oblong-elliptic**, about 70 mm long; shiny, dark green above; paler below, with a very prominent midrib; **lateral veins forming herring-bone pattern**. FLOWERS small, greenish yellow. FRUIT almost cylindrical, up to 20 mm long; fleshy, yellow-orange when ripe; brown, crinkly, raisin-like when dry.

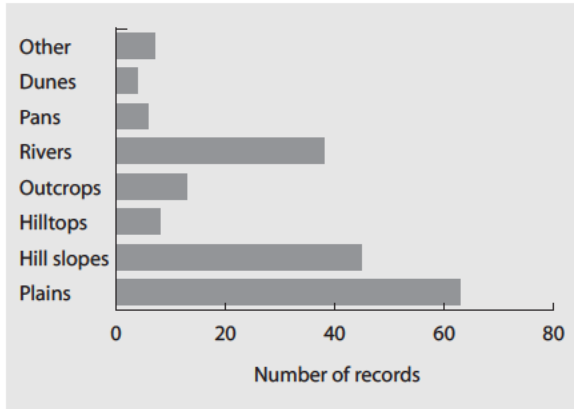
Flowers are easily overlooked, but fruit is conspicuous when ripe.

**DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE**

Uncommon to common north of 21° S, but absent from large areas within this range, particularly from areas of deep sand. Common to occasionally abundant in the Cuvelai.

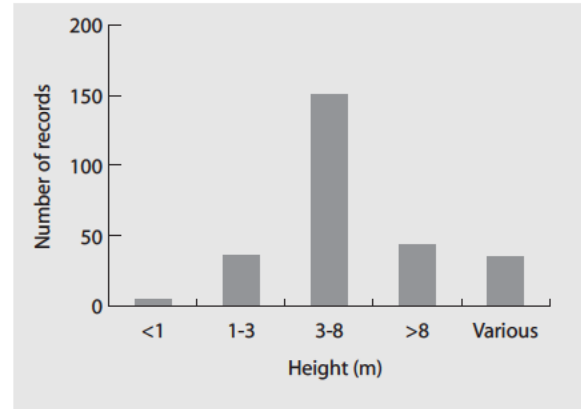
HABITAT

Found in various habitats but mainly on plains, hill slopes and river banks; recorded on rocky outcrops in the north-west and along river banks in the north-east. Substrates include sand, loam, sandy clay, gravel, dolomite ridges and calcareous soils.



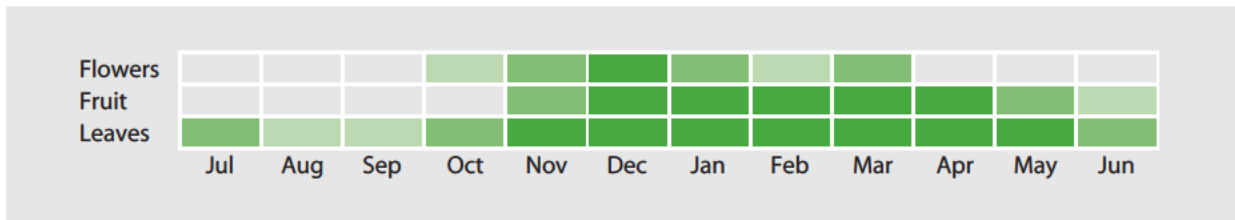
GROWTH FORM

Generally a tree 3–8 m high, but sometimes over 8 m. There were not many records of young trees.



ANNUAL CYCLE

FLOWERS peak in December, with a smaller peak in March (March flowering occurred across its range in two of the six years). FRUIT November to June. LEAVES deciduous, but always some individuals with leaves; new leaves in October.



GENERAL

This species has many uses. The fruit is high in sugar and contains vitamin C. Large trees, which are left when woodlands are cleared for fields, are protected for their fruit for home use and market. It is eaten fresh, or dried and stored for use in the dry season; dried fruit have a date-like flavour. Fresh fruit is fermented to make beer. The bark is used medicinally and for basket dye; the wood is used for furniture, hut construction and other items.

Birds, monkeys and tree squirrels also eat the fruit. The leaves are browsed by game and livestock.

Berchemia discolor has horticultural potential in frost-free areas. Although few young trees were recorded by atlasers, it was recorded that many young ones are found where seeds have been deposited by those eating the fruit (HOR2); the seeds are also dispersed by birds, as demonstrated by the many seedlings beneath big trees of other species.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

This species is protected by forestry legislation, as well as by traditional Owambo cultures for its fruit and shade. The population does not appear to be in any real danger at the moment, but communities could be encouraged to plant this species.