

Dichrostachys cinerea

Omutjete

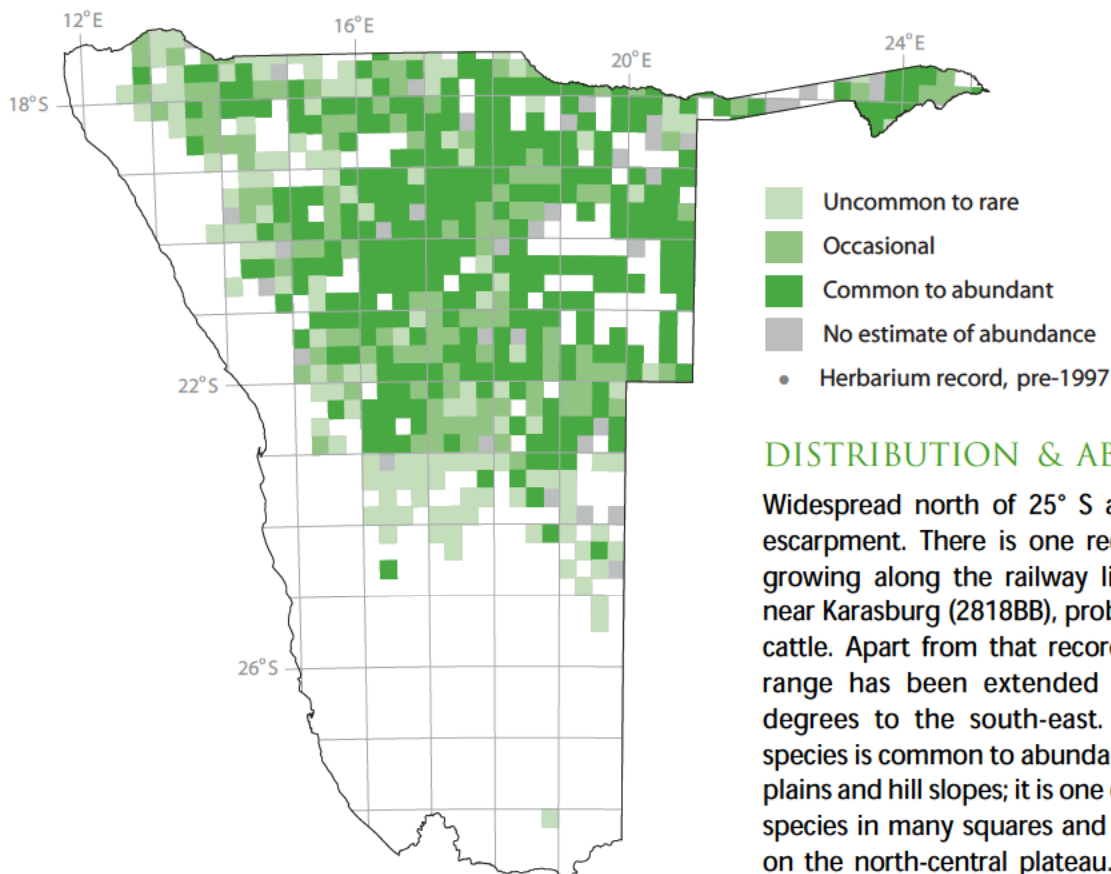
Kalahari Christmas tree, sickle-bush (E); papwielbos, sekelbos (A); Farbkätzchenstrauch (G); |goes (K); mishale (L); ongete (O); mwege (Rk)

[2,189 records from 592 (55%) squares]



A deciduous shrub or small tree, with sturdy, **spinescent, lateral branches up to 40 mm long**, with sharp, dark brown tip. LEAVES with very small leaflets. INFLORESCENCE a **hanging cluster of two types** of flowers: sterile, **pink basal flowers** and bisexual, **yellow apical flowers**. FRUIT a pod, hanging in **clusters**, dark brown, **sickle-shaped to contorted**, indehiscent.

The spines, bicoloured flowers and clustered pods make this species unmistakable. Subspecies *africana*, with two varieties, occurs in Namibia. Each variety has very obscure distinguishing characteristics making them difficult to tell apart and so they have not been differentiated by the TAP.

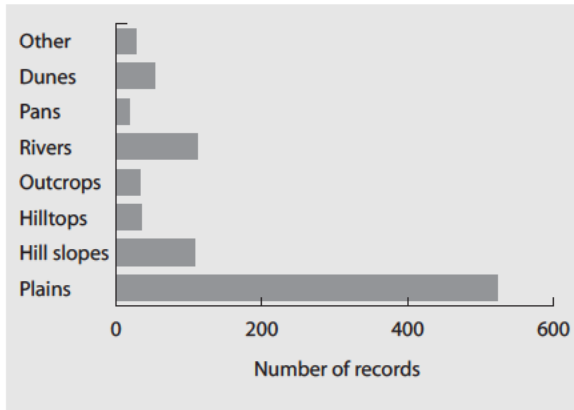


DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE

Widespread north of 25° S and east of the escarpment. There is one record of a plant growing along the railway line at Wolplaas near Karasburg (2818BB), probably seeded by cattle. Apart from that record, the recorded range has been extended by nearly two degrees to the south-east. Generally, this species is common to abundant, especially on plains and hill slopes; it is one of the dominant species in many squares and most abundant on the north-central plateau. Uncommon to locally common in the north-west.

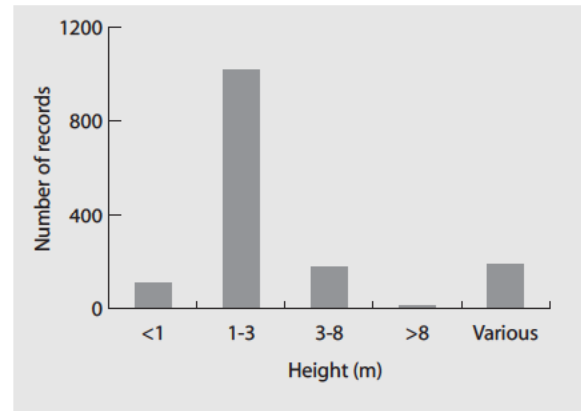
HABITAT

Found in a wide variety of habitats, although most often on plains. Along dry river courses in the north-west, north-east and south; hill slopes in the Karstveld, north-central plateau and central highlands; dunes in the north-east and south-east. Generally on sandy or calcareous substrates, but also stony/rocky substrates, sandy loam or clay.



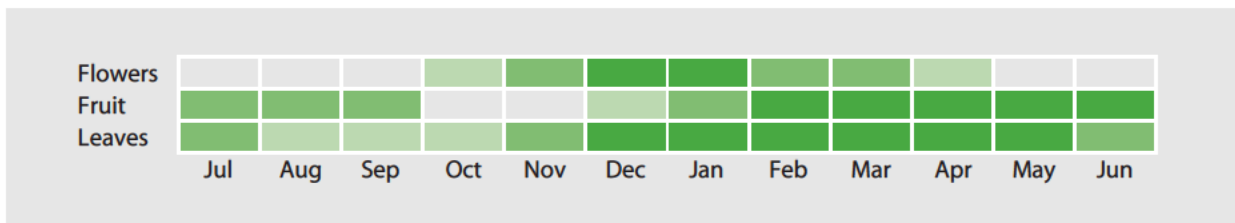
GROWTH FORM

Mostly a shrub up to 3 m high, occasionally over 3 m. In the north-east, sometimes a tree up to 8 m high, seldom over 8 m.



ANNUAL CYCLE

FLOWERS start in October and last until April, with a peak in December and January. Plants may flower more than once in a flowering season. FRUIT a few may be found all year, peak production from February to June; young fruit were recorded between December and May, and old fruit from July to December. LEAVES some all year, but mostly between December and May; young leaves in October and November.



GENERAL

An aggressively invasive species, dominating large areas and forming impenetrable thickets. Under normal thorn-tree savanna conditions it will not necessarily displace other species, even when present in high numbers. It invades disturbed areas, especially where mechanical clearing has taken place. It has been found that this species is far less likely to invade areas treated with herbicides; this has been attributed to a lack of nursery plants to protect it when it is young. It is often damaged by frost.

Good browse for livestock and game, including antelope, giraffe and rhino. The pods have a high protein content, and are used as livestock fodder. It makes excellent firewood. Traditionally a preferred wood for making digging sticks, also used for archery bows, knobkierries; the leaves and roots used medicinally. There were reports of it causing severe blood-poisoning caused by stepping onto the thorns.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Of concern because of its effect on other species.