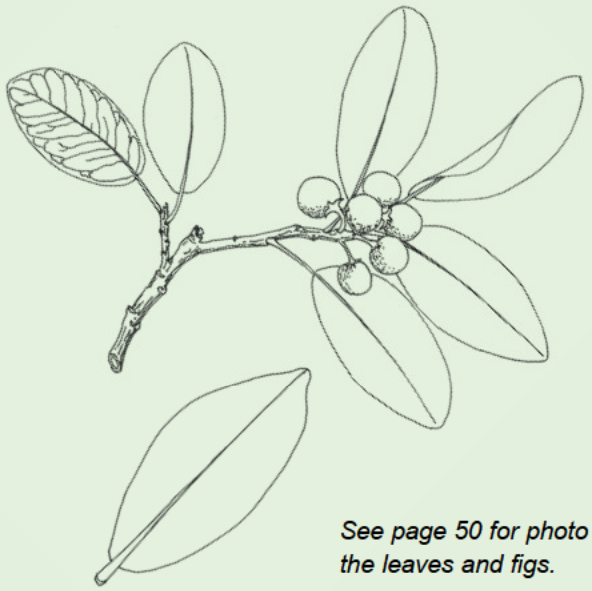
Ficus burkei

= Ficus thonningii

Strangler Fig

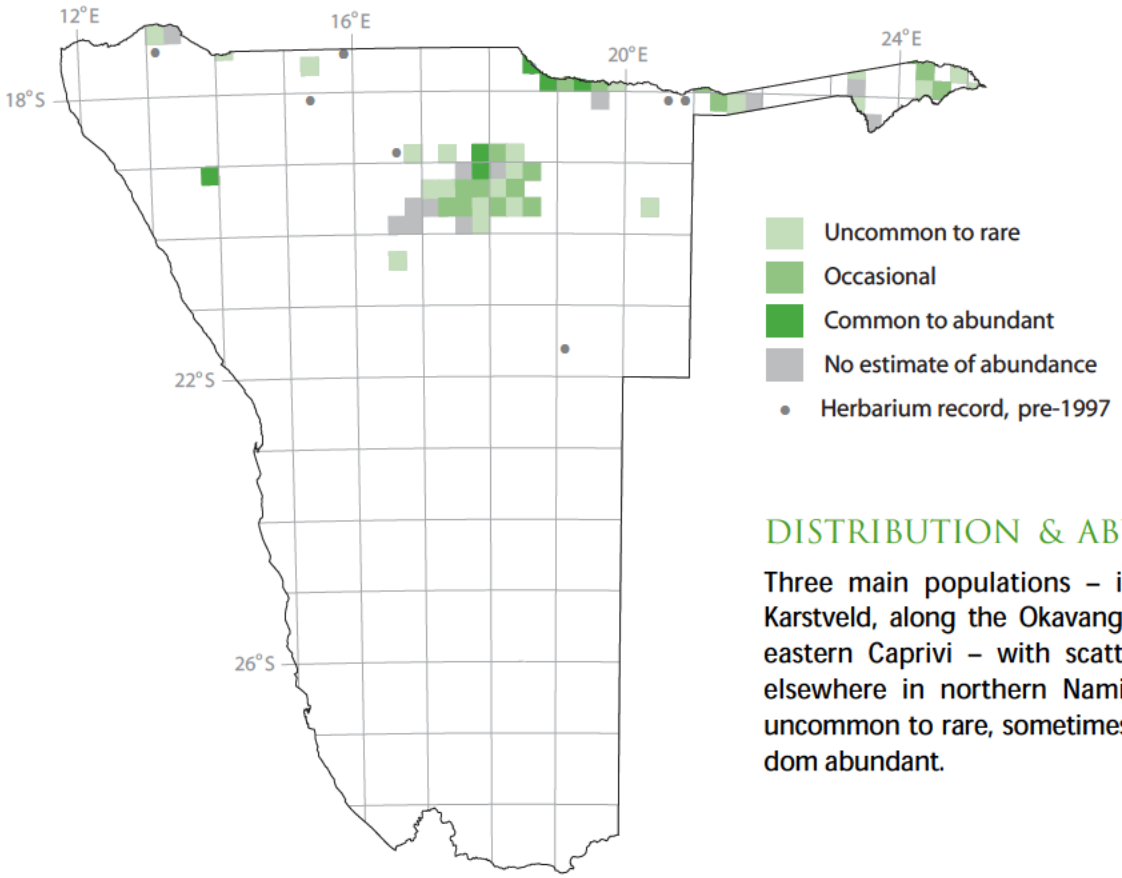
Wildevy (A); Würgefeige (G); omuhoro (H); omupuya (Od); mutata (R)

[208 records from 58 (5%) squares]



See page 50 for photo of the leaves and figs.

Evergreen or semi-deciduous tree with a dense canopy, 7–20 m high, trunk diameter up to 1 m, often with red aerial roots dangling from branches. BARK crumbly, white to grey; **young branchlets pale green with rust-red, downy covering**. LEAVES **oblong-elliptic**, 40–100 mm long; dull green to grey-green, veins prominent; **apex blunt to pointed; base blunt to broadly tapering**; petiole thick. FIGS solitary or paired in leaf axils on terminal branches, 8–12 mm in diameter, reddish when ripe, densely downy, sessile or almost so.

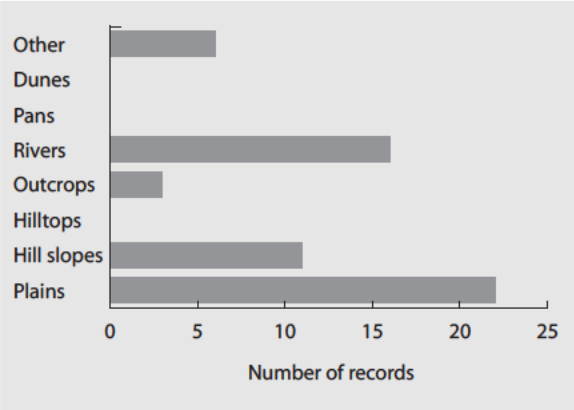


DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE

Three main populations – in the eastern Karstveld, along the Okavango River and in eastern Caprivi – with scattered localities elsewhere in northern Namibia. Generally uncommon to rare, sometimes common, seldom abundant.

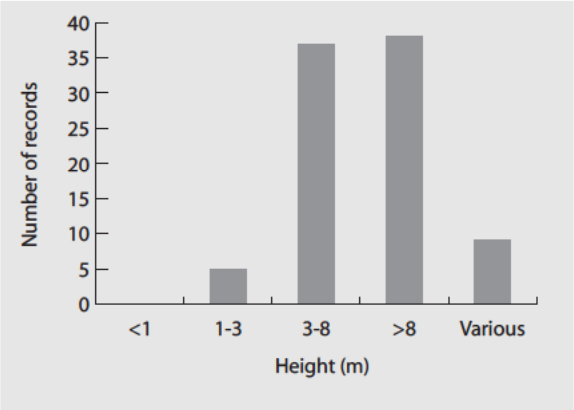
HABITAT

Various, but most often on plains and dolomite hill slopes in the Karstveld, and sandy or loamy river banks in the north-east. Sometimes found at springs.



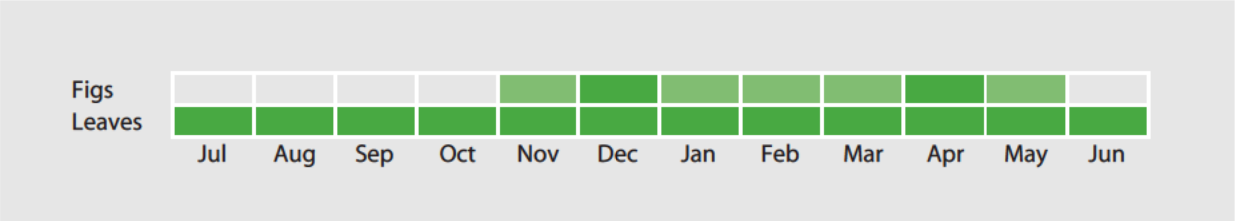
GROWTH FORM

A tree up to 8 m high, or higher; sometimes a strangler.



ANNUAL CYCLE

FIGS mostly from November to May, with two peaks – December and April, but some found all year. LEAVES evergreen, with young leaves in October and November.



GENERAL

Strangler on various trees, including *Kigelia africana*, *Combretum imberbe* and *Faidherbia albida*. On maturing, their light grey bark often envelopes that of the host, giving the appearance of two canopies on one trunk – its own and that of the host. *Ficus burkei* is used as an indicator of groundwater. Its roots and bark are used medicinally and its fruit is edible, fresh, dried or prepared as an alcoholic beverage.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

None recorded. Protected by forestry legislation.

THE FICUS THONNINGII COMPLEX

Previously a number of similar species was lumped together under this name. As the type specimen for *F. thonningiii* has been lost, and the original description was not very detailed, no-one can say for sure what it really is or what its distribution is. Experts now prefer to split it into its component species. There is still disagreement as to which species occurs in Namibia, with Burrows (2003) showing *F. petersii* and Germishuizen & Meyer (2003) and Coates Palgrave (2002) showing *F. burkei*. Most of our specimens fit the description of the latter species better, although we have recently found a specimen on top of the Baynes Mountains that could well be *F. petersii*.