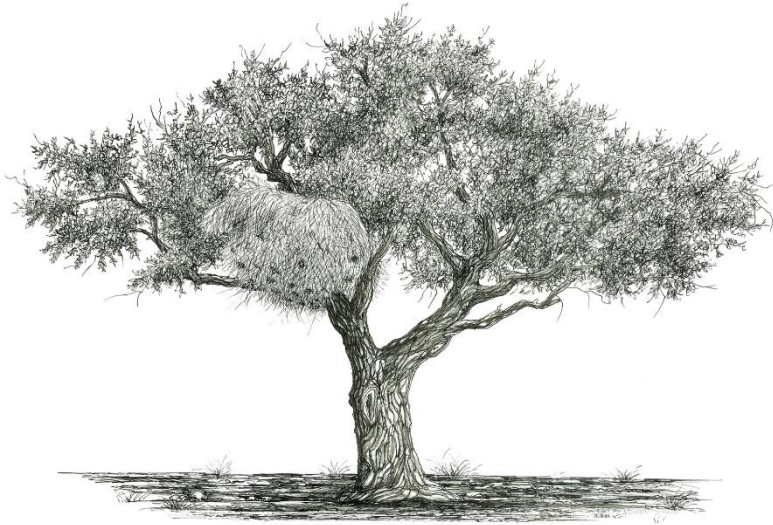


Camelthorn tree

Vachellia Erioloba



Oshiwambo: omuthiya
Kavango languages: musu
Afrikaans: Kameelboom

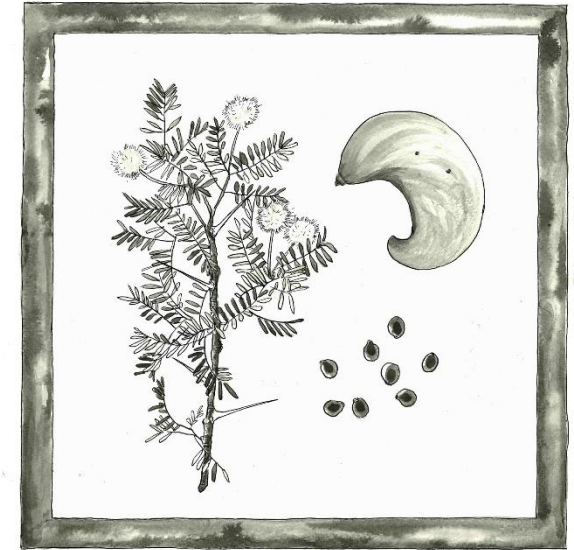
Otjiherero: omumbonde
Caprivi languages: muhoto
Deutsch: Kameldornbaum

The Camelthorn is probably the most iconic tree in Namibia. With its grey, velvety moon-shaped pods in winter, bright yellow flowers in spring and long, white thorns it can be easily recognized, especially when it reaches its mature stage. It is known to have a lifespan exceeding 240 years. It is common throughout Namibia and can often be found in dry riverbeds where the long taproot (the longest of which measured is 68 metres) is able to reach the groundwater.

The tree has many uses: the wood is prized for its hardness, durability and resistance to insects and is worked into tools and fence posts. A number of medicinal uses are known for livestock and human purposes. A root-infusion is, for example, used to treat coughs. In the past, seeds were used as a substitute for coffee. The seed pods have a high protein content and are therefore favoured by wild animals and livestock alike. As such the pods are often collected for fodder.

It is also a favored fire-wood which results in Camelthorn trees often harvested for their wood. Although the tree is quite common, it is very slow growing with only a small number of seedlings surviving into the next rainy season. The collection of seed pods and the over-exploitation as a firewood has resulted in Camelthorn forests and specimens being threatened. As such it is a protected tree in Namibia.

The tree provides a source of food and shelter to mammals, insects and birds and is therefore considered a keystone species, specially in the Kalahari area. This means it provides a vital element of support to animals within a specific environment and is as such critical to maintain a healthy eco-system. As an example, it is the favored habitat for the sociable weaver who make their large nests in the branches of the tree.



Sources:

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