**Croton gratissimus**

**Laventelbos / Mbango**

Lavender croton (E); omumbango (H, O); apupueb (K); mukewa (L); mwango (T)

[968 records from 349 (33%) squares]

Lax shrub or tree. Bark rough, grey-brown to black. **Young branchlets with a dense covering of silvery hairs and rust-brown scales.** Leaves simple, elliptic to elliptic-lanceolate, up to 100 mm long; dark green above; silvery with scattered red-brown scales below; petiole 6–25 mm long. Flowers yellow. Fruit a rough, three-lobed yellowish capsule.

This plant may be confused with *C. menyharthii*, which has a far shorter petiole.

There are two varieties of *C. gratissimus* in Namibia. They are easily distinguished by the presence of rough, stellate hairs on the upper surface of the leaf of var. *subgratissimus* that are absent in var. *gratissimus*. However, few atlassers were aware of this distinction and it is not possible to tell the variety from a moving vehicle. Thus, for the purposes of the TAP, the two varieties have been analysed together.
DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE
Widespread and generally common over northern Namibia north of 23° S, except in the Namib Desert and western Caprivi. Common to abundant and dominant in places in the Cuvelai, Karstveld, and the north-east; less common in the west. Variety gratissimus is the more common and widespread, occurring over the whole range. Variety subgratissimus extends over most of the range, except the north-east apart from eastern Caprivi where it does occur; it is more common in the north-west than variety gratissimus.

HABITAT
Found in a variety of habitats, mostly on plains, hill slopes and rocky outcrops. It is also found along dry rivers in the north-west, and on dunes in the north-east and central-east. Grows on sand, rock and calcrite.

GROWTH FORM
Mostly a shrub, sometimes a tree, up to 3 m high; less often up to 8 m high.

ANNUAL CYCLE
Flowers there are two distinct peaks, the first in December, and the second, larger peak in April, although flowering may start in September. Fruit present all year, but most abundant from February to May. Leaves can be found on some individuals all year, but the highest number of bare trees is from August to October; new leaves produced from August to December.

GENERAL
The leaves are browsed by cattle, goats and game. Crushed leaves are used as perfume by young San women; boiled leaves can be used as soap. Various parts of the plant are used medicinally. The shrub tends to become numerous in cleared areas. The specific name, gratissimus, means ‘most pleasant’. Other, unconfirmed names submitted by atlassers include ‘oshibango’ and ‘oshitupaheke’ (both Oshiwambo, MAN1) and N?aq'ara (Ju'hoan, STE6).

CONSERVATION CONCERNS
None recorded.