

Welwitschia mirabilis

Welwitschia

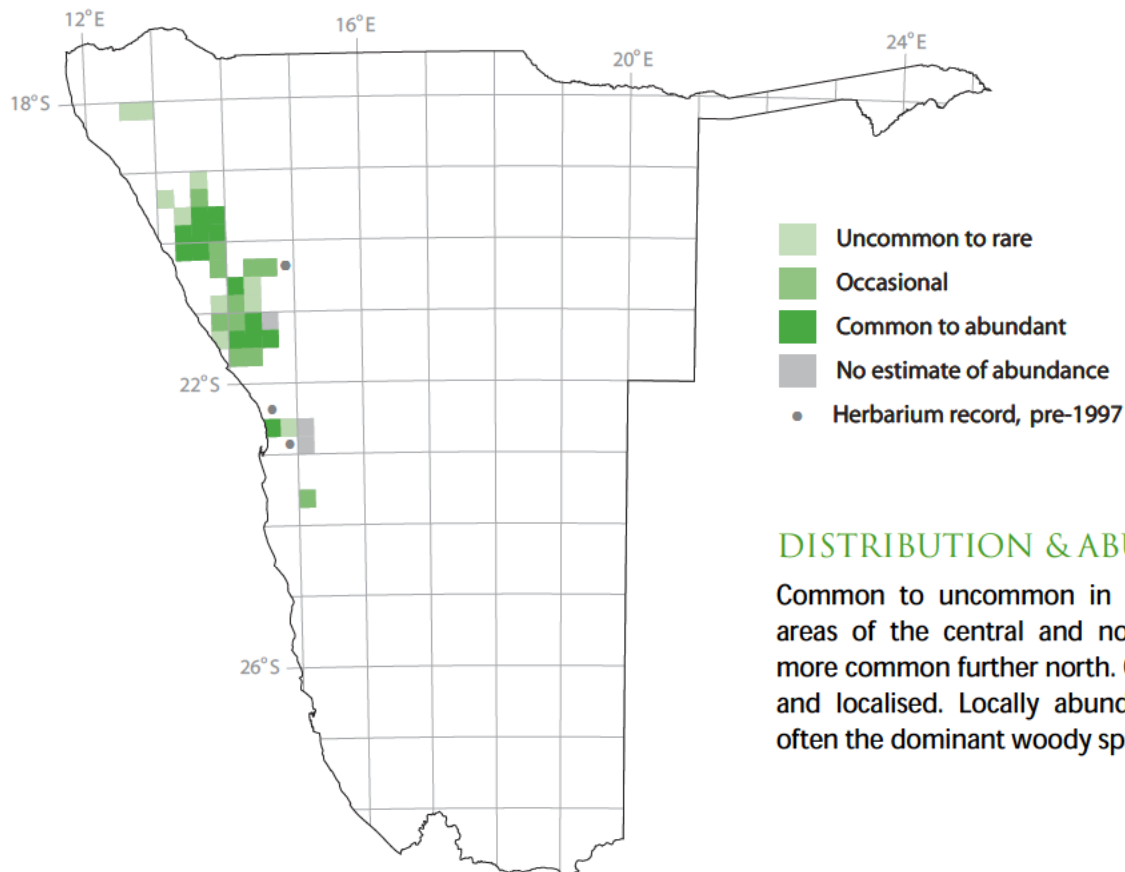
Tweeblaarkanniedood (A);
onyanga (H); !kharos (K)

[107 records from 37 (3%) squares]



Short, stocky dwarf tree up to 2 m high and sometimes more than that in diameter, with a thickset, dark grey, rough, fissured trunk and an appearance often described as octopus-like. LEAVES only **two**, growing continuously from either side of the trunk; without a petiole; thick, leathery, yellow-green to dark-green; initially with parallel margins, later splitting, fraying and twisting, giving the impression that the plant has more than two leaves. INFLORESCENCE a cone; male (right) and female (left) cones on separate plants.

The cones are easily visible, but the seeds ('Fruit' in annual cycle diagram) are only noticeable if one approaches the plant.

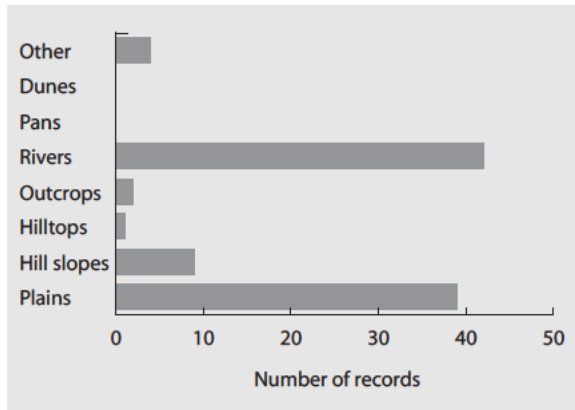


DISTRIBUTION & ABUNDANCE

Common to uncommon in small, disjunct areas of the central and northern Namib; more common further north. Often clumped and localised. Locally abundant in places; often the dominant woody species.

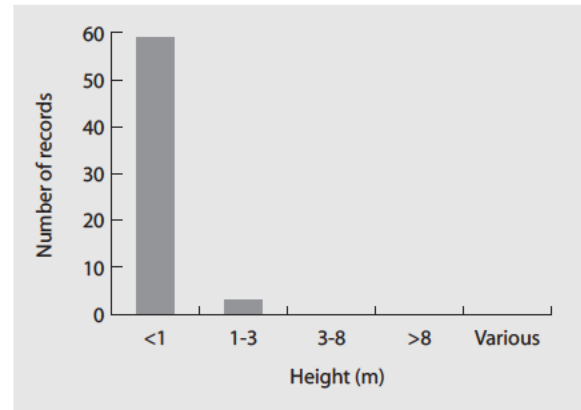
HABITAT

Mostly gravel plains and dry washes, sometimes on lower hill slopes and scree slopes. Always on gravel, stony or rocky ground.



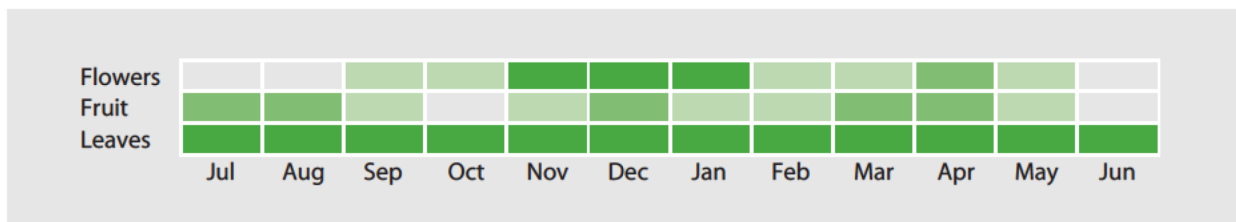
GROWTH FORM

Variouly described as a tree or a shrub, the majority being less than 1 m high. Many small plants recorded around Wêreldsend (2013BB).



ANNUAL CYCLE

FLOWERS mainly November to April; young ones recorded in December. FRUIT December to August mostly. LEAVES evergreen.



GENERAL

The leaves are eaten by zebra and rhino in times of severe drought, also browsed by domestic goats and donkeys; sometimes the leaves are cut off neatly, other times the flesh is eaten and the fibres are left as long stringy bits on the ends of the leaves. Plant-sucking bugs are always present. In certain areas, seeds are often fungus-infested, which may limit germination success. It was recorded that many leaves had been cut off by river action and many plants uprooted in the Numas Gorge of the Brandberg (GUD1, April 2000). Extensive research has been and continues to be done on this species.

CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Biologically unique, this species is of great economic importance as a tourist attraction. The plants in the Kuiseb River valley near Gobabeb (2315CA) are under serious threat from domestic animals. Endemic to Namibia and southern Angola; protected by the Nature Conservation Ordinance; listed as a CITES Appendix II plant.

