

Balanites rotundifolia (B. orbicularis)**Balanitaceae****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Baddan; **Daasanach:** Kuute, Kuusam (plural); **Gabra:** Baddana; **Malakote:** Mubadana; **Marakwet:** Lomion; **Orma:** Baddan; **Pokot:** Lomion, Loma (fruit); **Rendille:** Kulum; **Samburu:** Sarai; **Somali:** Kullan; **Swahili:** Mbamba ngoma; **Tugen:** Tirikikwa; **Turkana:** Ebei; **Wardei:** Kullan.

DESCRIPTION: A spiny multi-stemmed shrub or tree 2–5 m.

THORNS: Unusually dark green. Stout, to 3 cm and straight. **BARK:** Grey, later rough and furrowed.

LEAVES: Small, in pairs with no stalks, round to heart-shaped, grey-green, hairy. **FLOWERS:** Small green-yellow along the thorns. **FRUIT:** Oval, hairy to 2 cm (fruit and seed more rounded and smaller than those of *B. aegyptiaca*).

ECOLOGY: A common *Balanites* of the arid areas of eastern and north-eastern Africa. Found in Kenya, e.g. along the Turkwel River, in the Kerio Delta, Mutha Hill and in other parts of the country in dry *Acacia-Commiphora* bushland, often in rocky areas. Often seen as the only tree on sand dunes in northern Kenya, 50–1,350 m. Rainfall: 150–400 mm. Agroclimatic Zones VI–VII. Fruits in February and August–October (southern Turkana).

USES: Firewood, charcoal, poles, tool handles, carvings, utensils (head rests, wooden spoons, combs), edible fruit, edible seed, medicine, fodder (leaves and young shoots), bee forage, shade, soil conservation, live fence, dead fence (branches used for livestock enclosures), veterinary medicine.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site. Produces root suckers if roots are exposed.

SEED:

treatment: Not necessary.

storage: Seed, removed from fruit, can be stored for up to a year but are susceptible to insect attack. Best to use fresh seed.

MANAGEMENT: Slow growing; pruning.

REMARKS: A very drought-resistant tree, even more so than the desert date (*B. aegyptiaca*). The pulp of the ripe orange fruit is eaten fresh (Gabra, Boran, Somali, Turkana, Pokot, Daasanach). The seed are boiled for 3–4 hours (Turkana, Marakwet, Tugen, Pokot, Daasanach) and eaten, normally with milk. The fruit pulp is made into a local brew (Turkana). Wood burned for flavour and

to disinfect milk containers (Somali) and also used for making the board used in Koranic writing. Another important species is *B. pedicellaris* (**Marakwet:** Lomion, Lom (plural); **Pokomo:** Mhadana; **Pokot:** Lomion; **Rendille:** Ibule; **Samburu:** Sarai; **Taita:** Kiwowa; **Turkana:** Elamach; **Wardei:** Kullan) a spiny, often multi-stemmed much-branched shrub or, rarely, a small tree usually 2–4 m high, with a rather narrow crown. Larger spines usually with many smaller ones. Fruits more or less round, 2–3 cm in diameter, green, turning yellow when ripe. Widespread in Kenya, e.g. along Turkwel River and on Observation Hill (Amboseli). Usually along dry watercourses, 300–1,300 m. Rainfall: 200 (riverine)–500 mm. Cooked seeds are an important source of food in northern Kenya, particularly in Turkana. Fresh fruits are bitter and may be toxic. Fruits in February (southern Turkana, Baringo) or September–October (Turkana, Baringo).

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; ITDG and IIRR, 1996; Katende et al., 1999; Maundu et al., 1999; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002 (*B. pedicellaris*); Ruffo et al., 2002; van Wyk, 1998 (*B. pedicellaris*).

