

Lecaniodiscus fraxinifolius

Sapindaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Chona; **Duruma:** Mnyandakanda; **English:** River litchi; **Giriama:** Mbelenga; **Luo:** Mwanda; **Malakote:** Motobwi; **Pokomo:** Muhumbi, Muhumbi mweupe; **Sanya:** Muthompa; **Somali:** Chana; **Swahili:** Mkunguma; **Mbwewe, Mnanyakanda; Wardei:** Jana.

DESCRIPTION: A leafy tree 5–18 m, usually about 7 m.

BARK: Fairly smooth, grey, becoming darker and rougher, even scaly, with age. **LEAVES:** Alternate, compound, with 3–7 pairs of thin leaflets, generally oval, 3–11 cm long, the lowest leaflets often smaller, on a stalk to 5.5 cm, young leaflets orange-red, turning yellow-green, **tip tapering but blunt, base rounded, almost stalkless, the edge wavy when dried.** **FLOWERS:** Yellow-green, small, along rather loose unbranched **spike-like heads about 10 cm long, from leaf axils,** separate male and female trees, **no petals but 4–5 sepals to 3 mm,** about 10 stamens, very small yellow female flowers on shorter stalks than male flowers, urn-like in shape with soft black hairs at the tip of the neck. **FRUIT:** Yellow–orange–pink **capsules, ovoid, about 1 cm long,** the surface covered with short dense hairs; when ripe the **skin breaks irregularly to set free one hard seed** enclosed in an edible, blue–white fleshy covering.

ECOLOGY: Occurs in eastern Africa including Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Ethiopia and Somalia. In Kenya, mainly found along the coast and along River Tana. Also found in the Lake Victoria region but rare in the rest of the country. At the coast and in the Lake region found in forests, especially at forest edges and in disturbed areas. Elsewhere it is restricted to riverine forests and woodland. Does not seem to prefer red soil. Agroclimatic Zones II–VII (riverine). Flowers in January–February and seeds mature in April at the coast.

USES: Firewood, charcoal, poles (house construction), tool handles, carvings, utensils (wooden spoons, mortars, fish traps), edible fruit, medicine (bark, roots), bee forage, shade, material for basketry.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, wildings.

SEED: Seed germinate easily.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing.

REMARKS: When producing new leaves the tree is occasionally inhabited by insect larvae with irritating hairs. This tree has very hard wood and can live for several hundred years. The tree on Ramogi Hill that the Luo regard as sacred and where their ancestor, Ramogi, is said to have tethered his animals, is this species. *Lecaniodiscus* is an African genus with only a few species.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Kokwaro, 1993; Palgrave and Palgrave, 2002; Ruffo et al., 2002.

