

Populus ilicifolia

Salicaceae

Indigenous

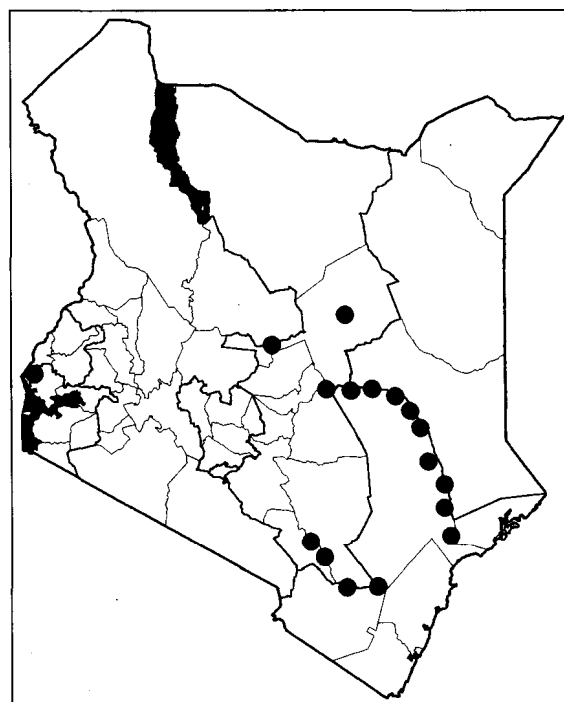
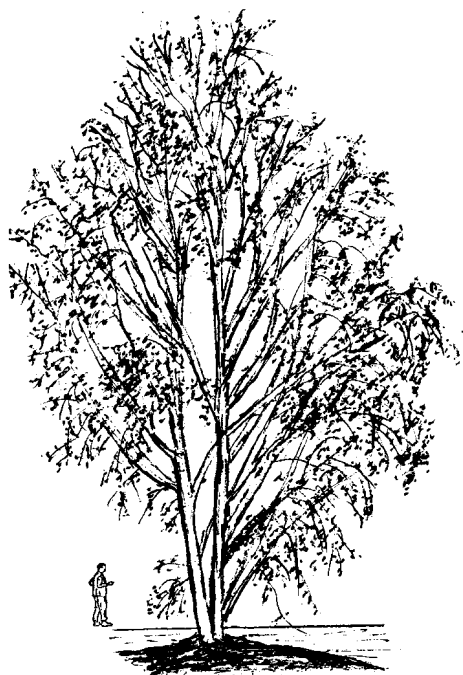
COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Siricha; **Boran:** Guduba; **Duruma:** Mlalali; **English:** Tana River poplar; **Ilchamus:** Mulalati; **Kamba:** Muti wa udi, Muti woosi, Mungai; **Orma:** Lalaftu; **Pokomo:** Lalaftu, Mlalahe; **Sanya:** Malalai; **Somali:** Sirkh.

DESCRIPTION: A tall semi-deciduous or evergreen tree to 30 m. **BARK:** Smooth and white, becoming brown-grey and rough with deep fissures. **LEAVES:** Grey-green or yellow-green, irregularly lobed, widest in the middle or slightly towards the base (may vary from thin and without lobes to deeply toothed on seedlings, young plants and coppice shoots), tip long-narrow or ending abruptly (cut) and lobed or notched, 4–12 cm long, smooth, leaf stalk usually twisted so that the leaves hang vertically. **FLOWERS:** Dioecious (male and female on separate plants) in catkins (fluffy wind-pollinated heads/spikes), **male catkins axillary**, reddish, 1–2 cm long with 6–9 flowers; **female terminal**, yellow-green 1–4 cm long with 5–15 flowers. **FRUIT:** Ovoid warty capsules, pale grey, later pink, up to 15 mm long, 2–4 valved. Seeds are covered with cotton-like hairs.

ECOLOGY: An endemic to Kenya, this species marks the southern-most natural distribution of the genus. Locally common in and restricted to riverine forests, sandbanks, riparian woodland along the banks of the Athi/Galana, Tana and Uaso Nyiro Rivers at low altitude, 0–850 m. A small population occurs near Ahero along the Nyando River in western Kenya at higher altitude than the rest of the area of distribution, but these trees we're probably planted. Usually found in alluvial soil but can also grow on other soils, including black cotton, so long as moisture and temperature levels are high. Agroclimatic Zones III–VII (riverine in all cases). Flowering periods are irregular, much influenced by moisture levels. Flowering in November (Yala); seeds mature in August–December in most areas, but also March–April in a few cases.

USES: Firewood (poor quality), poles, posts, beehives, utensils (mortars), boat building (canoes), withies, fodder, ornamental, avenue tree, river-bank stabilization.

PROPAGATION: Wildings, root suckers, layering, stem and root cuttings. Root suckers can be used for propagation of many species belonging to this genus.



***Populus ilicifolia* (cont)**

MANAGEMENT: Requires deep well-drained soils. Fast growing and coppices well. Roots of most poplars can be troublesome near pavements, houses and drainage systems and should therefore not be planted near these structures.

REMARKS: Wood used by the Pokomo for poles and in canoe making, but it is soft. Some trees along the Tana show dieback (drying from the top) and leaves fall in substantial amounts during the rainy season. Seeds germinate easily when covered by alluvial soils. Live-stock and elephants eat the leaves. The crown is thin, especially during the rainy season (the height of leaf fall) and therefore it may be intercropped with food crops such as maize, rice, millet and bananas. The tree has potential in the wood industry. *Populus* is a northern temperate genus with close to 3 dozen members distributed from North America across Europe and North Africa to Asia. They are popular in gardens and parks and as avenue trees. Most poplars have white soft timbers used for matches and boxes. They do not live long.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; FAO, 1979.

