

Tamarix nilotica

Tamaricaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Tamarisk; **Kamba:** Nzinzinda; **Malakote:** Durtya jovu, Durtya wachaloh; **Orma:** Durte galana; **Somali:** Duur; **Turkana:** Echeme, Echekereng.

DESCRIPTION: A well-branched evergreen shrub or tree to 6 m. **Crown rather like that of a conifer, with whip-like stems.** **BARK:** Yellow-brown. **LEAVES:** Minute and scale-like, usually 1–3 mm long, without a conspicuous stalk, concave, alternate, glandular, on slender green branchlets. **FLOWERS:** Flowers pink-white, at the tips of branchlets, small, in slender spikes 5–9 cm long, each flower less than 2 mm long, with 5 floral parts. **FRUIT:** A capsule, 4–5 mm long, splitting to release tiny seeds, each with a tuft of hairs at one end.

ECOLOGY: Members of this family are common in the Mediterranean area. This species is found in the dry lowland areas of northern, eastern, southern and coastal Kenya, along rivers in woodland or bushland, and growing on almost pure sand, 0–1,050 m. It is common along the lower parts of Tana River and in parts of Turkana District. The shrub is very drought hardy and the slender green branchlets serve the usual function of green leaves. Agroclimatic Zones V–VI.

USES: Firewood, poles, posts, tool handles, shade, ornamental, mulch, dune fixation, river-bank stabilization, wind-break.

PROPAGATION: From cuttings of the previous year's growth, wildings.

SEED: Seed information is lacking but probably similar to *T. aphylla*. In the latter case, cuttings are preferred to seeds. Seeds in closed capsules are not usually fertile, therefore only capsules that are just opening or have partly opened should be collected. *T. aphylla* has 100,000–286,000 seeds per kg.

storage: Probably similar to those of *T. aphylla* which lose viability within a few days. Use cuttings.

MANAGEMENT: Coppicing.

REMARKS: This species is much used by the Turkana in house construction and for firewood.

The closely related and better-known tamarisk, *T. aphylla* (**English:** Athel tree; **Somali:** Duur) has been recorded in Mandera. It is a well-branched evergreen shrub or tree to 9 m. The irregular grey-green crown is rather like that of a conifer. Bark is light grey to red-brown, becoming thick and rough and deeply ridged. Branches are smooth, purple-brown. Leaves are borne on slender green-grey branchlets of twigs. Leaves remain as 2-mm scales encircling the branchlets, each with a sharp tip and appearing as one section along the jointed twig. Flowers are at the tips of branchlets, each one less than 3 mm, pink-white. Fruit is a narrow pointed capsule, 5 mm, splitting into 3 to release tiny brown seeds, each with a tuft of white hairs. *T. aphylla* is a tree of humid lowland savanna and woodlands as well as open flood plains and along rivers. It is distributed in West, East and North Africa and is common in the Middle East, extend-

ing to north-west India and south to Tanzania. It is usually found with *Faidherbia albida*, *Balanites* and *Tamarindus*; 200–400 m. Like other tamarisk species, it excretes 'salt' that drips from glands in the leaves at night so the soil below may be covered with salt. This salty drip kills any plants below the tree and the fallen leaves are too salty to burn—hence this tree can also be used as a firebreak. Crops should not be planted close to tamarisk as the tree roots collect all nearby water and plant nutrients. There are 50 or so *Tamarix* species. Many are often found in saline soils and leaves have salt-secreting glands. Many others have brightly coloured twigs and so are commonly seen being used as ornamentals.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestrycentre.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996 (*T. aphylla*); Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; (*T. aphylla*); National Academy of Sciences, 1980, 1983 (*T. aphylla*).

