

Thespesia danis

Malvaceae

Indigenous

COMMON NAMES: **Boni:** Mlambale, Balambali; **Digo:** Muhowe; **Giriama:** Muhowe, Howe (fruit), Mkumbo; **Malakote:** Mudaanisa; **Orma:** Danis; **Pokomo:** Mwaro, Mwachesa, Mkarara; **Sanya:** Dane, Danis; **Somali:** Kobhan, Khaphan, Denisa; **Swahili:** Muhowe, Muhonda; **Wardei:** Kabxan, Quararari.

DESCRIPTION: A shrub or tree 1–6 m high. **BARK:** Dark grey, fissured. **LEAVES:** Very broadly ovate, **base heart-shaped**, tip without a long narrow sharp end, up to 9 cm long, densely scaly. **FLOWERS:** **Borne singly**, large, to 4 cm, **yellow, with a red, pink or purple centre** and a persistent calyx. **FRUIT:** Roundish, usually few.

ECOLOGY: A common plant in the coastal lowlands of eastern Africa. In Kenya, found in north-eastern parts and south to the coast. Common in flood zones and riverine vegetation, also at forest margins, in bushland and in thickets in lowland humid areas. Agroclimatic Zones III–VII (riparian in dry areas). Flowers in January–March and fruits ripen in July–August at the coast.

USES: Firewood, poles, posts, clubs, bows and arrows (stems), clubs, utensils (spoons, bowls), fibre (bark), withies (twigs), tool handles, food (fruit), medicine (roots), fodder, shade, river-bank stabilization, ornamental, used for making fire by friction.

PROPAGATION: Seedlings.

SEED: The seed germinates after the outer cover rots, which takes some time.

treatment: Remove fleshy part of the fruit and clean the seed to hasten germination.

storage: Seed frequently attacked by insects, thus avoid storage.

MANAGEMENT: Pruning, pollarding.

REMARKS: It can become a weed, as has happened along parts of the coast. The tree can produce fruit abundantly if grown in a fertile place. The wood is hard and durable, and hence is used for carving utensils.

Another two members of this tropical genus occur in Kenya: *T. garckeana* (*Azanza garckeana*) and *T. populnea*, a coastal shrub distinguished by the long sharp leaf tip (compared with that of *T. danis*). Flowers of *T. populnea* are usually larger (to 8 cm) and the fruit is round to 5 cm. Leaves are usually larger, to 15 cm. Very common along beaches from the high-water mark and also next to mangroves.

FURTHER READING: Beentje, 1994; Kokwaro, 1993.

