

Delonix elata**Fabaceae (Caesalpiaceae)****Indigenous**

COMMON NAMES: **Boran:** Sukella; **Gabra:** Sukella; **Iichamus:** Sukele; **Kamba:** Muange; **Maasai:** Olderkesi, Oltangoringoroi; **Orma:** Sukele; **Pokot:** Ririon; **Rendille:** Bubunto; **Samburu:** Laichimi, Lawai; **Somali:** Labi, Lebbi, Lowee (Mandera); **Tharaka:** Mwarange; **Turkana:** Ekurichanait.

DESCRIPTION: A deciduous twiggy shrub or, more conspicuously, a tree to 15 m with a rounded spreading light crown and drooping branches. **BARK:** Quite conspicuous, **smooth and shiny, pale yellow to grey-white**, sometimes flaking. **LEAVES:** Twice-divided, to 15 cm with 2–12 pairs of pinnae, each with 10–25 opposite pairs of leaflets, **long oblong about 1.7 cm, dull green** with tiny hairs both sides. **FLOWERS:** Large green buds open into showy white flowers **near tips of branchlets, only one of a group flowering at a time**, 4 white petals up to 3.8 cm long with **wavy cut-up edges** and one smaller yellow petal, all **fading to a yellow-orange** colour with time; **10 orange-to-red stamens to 10 cm hang out of the flower**. **FRUIT:** Red-brown pods, **flat and thin, pointed both ends, usually about 13–20 cm but may be up to 27 cm**, contain smooth olive-brown oblong seeds in horizontal pockets.

ECOLOGY: A tree of hot dry *Acacia-Commiphora* bushland from Egypt south to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania, east to the Arabian peninsula and India. In Kenya often associated with loam, sandy loam and rocky soils. It is also found on lava in the hot drylands, 100–1,200 m. Usually along luggas, and common, for example, in Mwingi, Magadi, Tsavo West and most of northern Kenya. Agroclimatic Zones V–VII. Flowers mainly during the rainy season, e.g. in December–January in Mwingi and Tsavo.

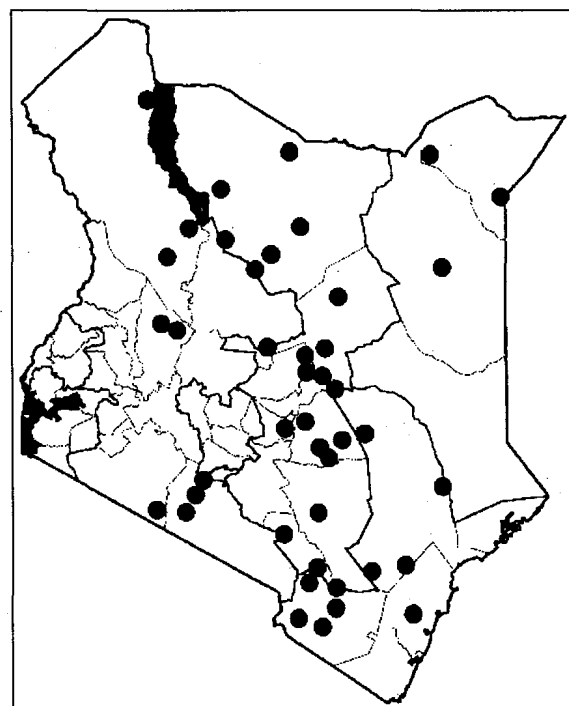
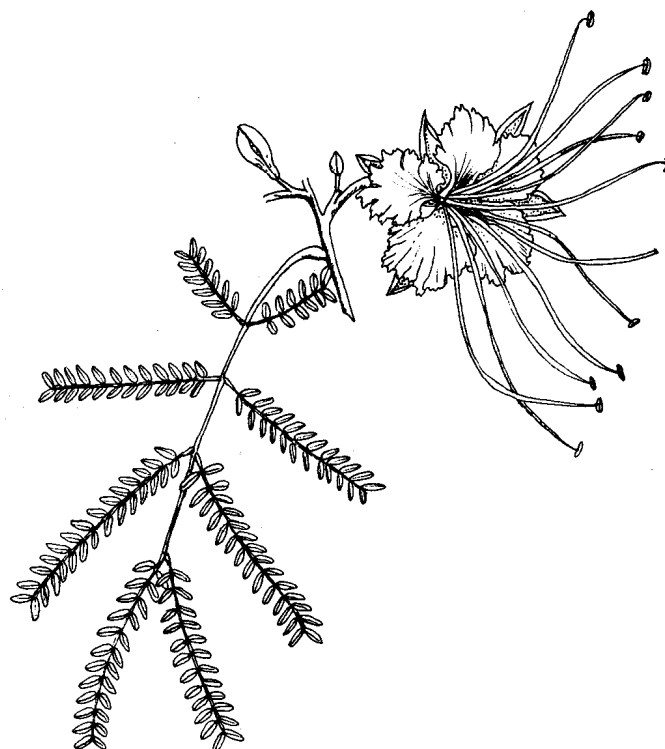
USES: Timber, furniture, posts, beehives, tool handles, toothbrushes, utensils (wooden spoons, cups, grain mortars, beer containers, milk pots, camel bells, salt and water troughs for livestock), food (edible seed boiled as famine food), medicine (roots, bark, leaves and twigs, pods, gum to treat wounds), fodder, bee forage, shade, ornamental, tannin (fruit), beads (seeds).

PROPAGATION: Seedlings, direct sowing at site, wildings.

SEED: About 6,000 seeds per kg.

treatment: Immerse in hot water, allow to cool and soak for 24 hours, or nick the seed at the distal (cotyledon) end with a knife or nail clipper. Germination rate up to 60% within 4–15 days.

storage: Mature and properly dried seed can be stored in airtight containers at room temperature for at least a year, but it is difficult to keep them free of insects.



Delonix elata (cont)

MANAGEMENT: Fast growing; coppicing, pollarding, lopping.

REMARKS: One of the largest and most useful trees in arid lands. The large yellow or white flowers make the tree most attractive in the flowering season. The Samburu carve camel bells from the wood, and in Wajir it is used to burn limestone rocks to make whitewash. Holes in the trunks hold water that people use in the dry season. The other indigenous member of this genus is *D. baccal*

(**Boran:** Balanga; **Somali:** Bakal), which replaces *D. elata* in deeper river gorges of northern Kenya, particularly in Mandera District. It is a tree to 18 m high with an umbrella-shaped crown. Leaflets are more numerous than in *D. elata*.

FURTHER READING: Albrecht, 1993; Beentje, 1994; Bein et al., 1996; Blundell, 1987; Dharani, 2002; Kokwaro, 1993; Maundu et al., 1999; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Ruffo et al., 2002.

