

## Remarkable trees of South Africa

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A marketing leaflet for this book says it "gives a fascinating glimpse into the world of trees, from the biggest, to the tallest, to the oldest, in South Africa".

The authors must be congratulated on a really presentable publication which I believe is a must read for those entering the fields of forestry, horticulture and conservation in South Africa. I can assure you that even I, as a 'seasoned forester', learnt several new tidbits of information. It is easily read and a great source of interesting facts.

There is a balanced approach to all trees in South Africa, with the exotics placed in a breath of fresh air, by presenting their significant role in local development. An interesting, and valuable, approach of the authors is the presentation of information on a 'Tree Family' basis, so bringing one face to face with

the indigenous and the exotic of the same family. An exciting experience.

It is disappointing that the Preface does not lay more stress on the "Procedures for declaring protected trees" in terms of Part 3 of the National Forests Act, 1998 (Act No 84 of 1998) and the invitation to provide data for the 'Big Tree Register'. (Incidentally on page 182 there is a reference to an Act of 1999, but this should read 1998)

I thought the treatment of the Family Pinaceae was particularly poor. There were also several families where the reader was left 'searching', because of the lack of dimension data on the trees

On page 183 I missed a short mention of SA forestry training (which started in 1906), while on page 185 one misses a credit to the Dept of Forestry's excellent invasive plant control efforts of the 70s and 80s. To me a significant omission from the Bibliography is "Trees and Shrubs : Cultivated in South Africa" by R.J.Poynton (4<sup>th</sup> Edition) 1984

In spite of the negative comments, a very valuable and attractive addition to the bookshelves of all those interested in trees in South Africa.

**Dennis Owen**

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## Resource assessment of non-wood forest products: Experience and biometric principles

*Authors: Wong, J.L.G., Thornber, K, and Baker, N. Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFP) Series No 13. FAO, Rome. 2001 109pp. Price US\$18 Obtainable from: publications-sales@fao.org*

This publication is based on the outputs of the British Forestry Research Programme's FRP pre-project (ZF0077) on the biometrics of current NWFP resource assessment methods. The publication consists of an overview of biometric issues in the design of NWFP inventory. Included with the book is a CD-ROM which contains an electronic version of the publication, as well as a literature database and the complete FAO NWFP website.

The aim of the publication is to raise awareness amongst practitioners of the importance of accurate and precise resource assessments at all levels of

forest use for non-wood products, and to provide guidance on the design and selection of appropriate methods for resource quantification in different situations and for different products. The information contained here builds on experience from tropical countries, but the authors believe it to be of use in all regions and for all products. The prospective audience includes practitioners, researchers, natural resource managers and all development workers with an interest in forest utilisation. The authors suggest that it will be of most interest to those people who already have some knowledge of basic inventory.

The book is divided into seven sections. Each section begins with a clear indication of what is contained in each.

In Section 1 the authors lay the groundwork for the rest of the publication. The objectives are high-



lighted once again, the definition of NWFPs and their importance is clarified, key terms are defined and finally the scope of the publication is delineated. My first question was "Why Non-Wood Forest Products, and not Non-Timber Forest Products?". Although the difference between the two was clearly spelt out, the reason for the choice was not obvious. While it is true that non-wood products have been neglected in inventories in the past, harvesting for poles and firewood often has the most devastating effect on the forest resources, and threatens their future survival. Additionally the distinction between what is 'woody' and what is not, is not clear. What category does bark fall into? Is it not a wood product? The confusion is not helped by the occasional typing error where NTFP has been used instead of NWFP.

In Section 2 the role of resource assessment in sustainable NWFP harvesting is reviewed and the various applications of valid resource assessments are discussed. Important end users are local people, forest managers and policy makers, particularly with the increasing use of certification methods to encourage sustainable use. The authors describe in detail the essence of a good inventory, and, using the following criteria as standards, assess the range of resource inventory methods that has been used over the past decade or so:

- Adequate reporting of protocols;
- Use of objective sampling designs; and
- Use of an adequate number of independent plots.

An interesting find was that only 14% of studies reviewed gave adequate details for in-depth assessment, with many failing to meet the minimum standards. The authors voice concern that many resource inventories and yield studies commonly fail to report protocol and/or use poor design. They conclude that if this finding reflects the situation generally, then much of the information provided in the published literature appears to lack credibility.

In Section 3, contemporary methods used for inventory yield measurement, growth studies, harvest determination and monitoring are assessed. In this detailed section, the different kinds of inventory and their various objectives are described, as well as the place of NWFPs in inventories in the past. Calculations of yield under different conditions, the use of data in predictive models to estimate sustainable yield, and the important role of monitoring in the whole process are also discussed. The section ends with an assessment of the role of local participation in inventories and yield studies. The inclusion of examples and case studies aids the reader in this section.

In Section 4 the authors assess a range of other non-quantitative methods for their biometric value and relevance to NWFP inventory. These include biodiversity inventory, social science techniques, cultural perspectives, ethnobotany and economic methods. The topics in this section are covered in

much less depth than in previous sections, and I was surprised not to see reference here to Tony Cunningham's latest and well-researched book entitled *Applied Ethnobotany* (Earthscan Publications), which details many of the approaches described by the authors in this section.

In Section 5 readers will find a useful series of steps to consider before embarking on a NWFP inventory of their own. This includes the relevance and application of biometrics in designing an inventory; a step-by-step approach to designing an inventory; and a list of planning and research needs for data analysis and presentation. This again is a very detailed section, with much relevant information.

Section 6 is a list of useful literature resources.

Section 7 is five annexes covering classification of NWFPs; understanding plots and sub-plots; NWFP inventory outputs; sampling methods; and useful institutions and their web sites.

The CD-ROM requires the installation of Acrobat Reader for use, which is done automatically if not available on your machine. However, it is worthy of note that users should exit all Windows packages before they begin, to avoid having to go back and start again, having done so. The layout of the CD is pleasing, with good graphics and background music to begin with (which becomes mesmeric if you leave the CD in the player without using it, and could be distracting to others in a library setting!). The instructions for use are clear and the menu easy to use.

The first item on the menu is the electronic copy of the publication. Second item is one called 'Supplements' which contains a number of published articles relevant to the study. The third item is a complete database of references used in this publication. These three items are followed by four reviews in French, which unfortunately are not of use to anyone except French speakers.

The penultimate item is a review of the proceedings of a workshop held in Rome in 2001, which gives a taste of the kind of NWFP work that is being undertaken by practitioners across the world. This is useful both for information, and for the development of potential collaborative links between researchers.

The CD-ROM ends with the complete FAO website on non-wood forest products, a major plus for those readers who do not have access to the internet. I found the information on the CD-ROM particularly informative.

Though the work is extremely comprehensive with a great deal of relevant information (or perhaps as a consequence of this) I found there tended to be duplication in the different chapters of the book. The first few pages of the publication appeared to me to be somewhat repetitive, as if aimed at those new to inventory, rather than those who already have some basic understanding. No doubt there will be many beginners who read this book, however, and this kind of detail is likely to be valuable to them. Further on, Section 2.5, in which the necessity of biometric meth-



ods in all inventories is discussed, using valuation methods as an example, would seem to fit better with Section 4, where the authors assess the contributions from other approaches to NWFP resource assessment, including valuation methods. The selection of sample plots and inventory methods is dealt with in Section 3, and again in Section 5, and so on.

If I have any negative comments about this detailed work, it is that it required a thorough editing before publication. It is a well conceived publication

which, despite the authors' attempts at clarity, is marred by a lack of streamlined structure and the many unfortunate grammatical and typographical errors. There is no doubt, however, that it an extremely useful resource.

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