

# Knob-thorn

When creamy-white, scented flowers transform the bushveld, you know spring has arrived.  
Illustrations by Daleen Roodt

*Senegalia nigrescens*  
(Knoppiesdoring)

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The knob-thorn's scientific name was recently changed from *Acacia nigrescens* to *Senegalia nigrescens*.



Acacias are pod-bearing trees and belong to the third-largest family of flowering plants in the plant kingdom. The knob-thorn *Senegalia nigrescens* forms part of this ecologically important thorn-tree family. *Nigrescens* refers to the seed that darkens when it dries out.

Between January and July the long, thin pods turn from reddish-purple to dark brown. They split open once they have fallen to the ground.

Knob-thorns are slow growing, with a single, straight trunk reaching eight to 20 metres. They grow in many different soil types, often alongside marulas, and are an indication of palatable grasses.

The knob-thorn is the first tree to bloom in spring, when food is scarce.

Longhorn beetles *Zographus plicaticollis* (male shown right) live in the dead wood, which is termite- and fire-resistant, hard and durable. Nesting birds make their homes in its thorny trunk. Near rivers, white-backed vultures nest in its branches. Local communities carve trunks and branches into traditional clubs and walking sticks (knobkieries), and long knob-thorn poles are planted next to village homes as lightning conductors.

*Senegalia nigrescens*

The branches form a rounded canopy that spreads with age. The bark is dark and where it thickens, knobs are formed several millimetres apart, equipped with small, black, hooked thorns. These offer protection against browsers such as elephants, which strip the bark off the stem. Look for thorny knobs on the trunks of young trees and on the newer branches of mature trees.

The tallest trees are always found on flood plains.



*Charaxes phaeus* ♀

Larvae of the butterfly *Charaxes phaeus* (female shown above) feed on the knob-thorn's leaves. Despite the thorns, the highly nutritious leaves are also browsed by kudu, elephant and giraffe. The flowers and pods are eaten by baboons and vervet monkeys. Elephants love the leaves, roots and inner bark, the natural healing properties of which fight tooth decay.



*Zographus plicaticollis* ♂



Daleen Roodt 2013

To stand a chance to win, simply answer the following question: What is the scientific name of the knob-thorn? SMS Knob-thorn: answer and your Wild Card number to 33929 or email competition@tipafrica.co.za (subject line: Knob-thorn). Closing date: 31 October 2013. It costs R1.50 an SMS. A winner will be selected by lucky draw.

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