

RED BUSHWILLOW

Combretum apiculatum

Among all *Combretum* species, the red bushwillow is the densest and the hardest of all.

When next you spot a glow of auburn along the upper slopes of sandy, rocky soils in the bushveld, you'll likely be looking at a clump of red bushwillows. This tree flashes red in more ways than one, with its autumn attire a coppery red, shifting into a smouldering red for winter, while the stringy, peeling bark of young branches ranges from grey to red-brown.

Like the russet bushwillow (*kierieklapper*), red bushwillow (*hardehout*) is a favourite for campfires and bush braais as it burns an entire day and delivers excellent coals. Even so, you should resist the temptation to collect hardwood in the veld as the trees grow slowly and dead branches, which are termite and borer resistant, are home to many smaller creatures.

You can identify red bushwillow by the hooked tip of the leaves. The name "apiculatum" refers to this pointy apex. Summer leaves are bright green and sticky, turning red in autumn, becoming a striking sight before shedding completely.

Combretum are key to bushveld habitat, especially mopane woodlands, and are often the dominant vegetation component on nutrient-poor sandy soils. Species identification is tricky, but look out for simple, opposite leaves. The branches are long and slender and hang down low, like a willow. *Combretum* refers to a climbing plant, though while many *combretum* species are climbers, the red bushwillow is not.



x 1.5"

DID YOU KNOW?
Weighing 1230 kg/m³, the wood of the red bushwillow is the hardest in Southern Africa.

In many *Combretum* species the spikes of the cream-coloured, yellowish flowers resemble little hedgehogs. The flowers attract insects which, in turn, attract birds, in particular parrots.

Brown-headed parrots are partial to the red bushwillow's seeds, but beware, the seeds are poisonous and can cause prolonged hiccuping.



The larvae of the striped policeman butterfly feed on this bushwillow.



♂ *Coeliades forestan forestan*

Combretum apiculatum

"Roosbos"



The four-winged seed pod, visible in autumn and winter, is a nutritious dry fruit which remains on the tree for a long time.

New growth in spring is browsed by a variety of game such as kudu, bushbuck, eland, giraffe and elephant. Butterfly caterpillars also feed on the leaves.

ILLUSTRATION OWNED BY DAAN SCHOEMAN FINANCIAL PLANNING SOLUTIONS

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WIN To stand a chance to win a certified print, simply answer the following question: What is the scientific name of the red bushwillow? Email the answer and your *Wild Card* number to competition@tipafrica.co.za (subject line: Bushwillow). Closing date: 31 August 2014. A winner will be selected by lucky draw.