

# AFRICA'S AMAZING PLANT DIVERSITY

**Baphia nitida:** The heart and bark of Camwood makes a red dye, traditionally used by the Igbo people of Nigeria to paint Uli designs on walls and skin.



**Triphyophyllum peltatum:** A curious plant of the West African rainforest. It goes through three stages in its life, each with a different leaf shape. In the second stage, it uses long sticky leaves to catch insects, which it eats!



**Acacia tortillis:** Animals need rough tongues to eat from the thorny branches of the hardy Umbrella Thorn Acacia of the savannah! Its leaves, flowers and seedpods are well-protected! It gives humans medicine, charcoal, food, and flowers to help bees make honey.



**Brachystegia (Miombo)** lives on the Zambezi plateau of Africa. It give only gentle shade, so a huge diversity of grasses and herbs can live beneath its crown. It spreads by "explosive dehiscence" or seed-pod explosion, by which seeds can be thrown up to 25 metres from the tree!



**Welwitschia**, plant of the Kaokoveld and Namib deserts, has found the secret to long life in the desert. They sit leathery-leaved and low on the ground, collecting water from the damp foggy air that rolls in from the Atlantic Ocean each night. They are tough, surviving fire and thirsty antelope. The oldest individuals are thought to be over 2000 years old.



**Rosa abyssinica:** Africa's only native rose lives in the Highlands of Ethiopia. It is known as *Kaga* in Amargna, *Qaqawwii* in Oromiffa, and *Dayero* in Somali. The fruits are tasty and rich in vitamins, but take care not to eat too much – stomach-ache and tingling teeth result!



**Protea cynaroides:** King Protea, the national flower of South Africa.



Scientists have recorded at least 120 species of rainforest butterflies that are found only here. The last of the West African forest elephants, and the endangered pygmy hippotamus live here too.

# Key to map

**TROPICAL RAINFORESTS OF CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICA:** Rainforests are packed full of biological diversity. Humans are one species. We represent a single, interbreeding animal. All types of humans can successfully have children with each other – assuming they want to!! Scientists don't even know how many species there are in the remote forests of Central and West Africa. The people who live there must know many things that scientists don't know!

**SAVANNAH:** Savannah is the internationally famous African landscape, where herds of animals graze on the grass, and lions and cheetah hunt. Trees stand isolated and beautiful with bee-eater birds in their branches. Humans, biologists now believe, evolved on the African plains. This was the habitat that encouraged us to stand up on two legs so that we could see over the tops of the grasses. This landscape is in our psyche – in our hearts and minds and souls. It was the habitat of our ancestors. Wherever people have gone in the world, they have cut down forests to recreate the savannah. In England and Europe, rich people create parks around their houses for recreation and enjoyment of nature. Is it a coincidence that these all have short grass, single trees, and grazing animals? Many people from all over the world describe arriving in the savannah as a feeling of going home. This makes Africa an amazing place for foreigners to visit.

**MIOMBO/MOPANE WOODLAND:** The miombo/mopane woodlands are at the heart of sub-Saharan Africa. The Miombo forests have help from fungi living in their roots, without which they could not grow on the poor soils. This is a tough environment with frequent fires and droughts. Habitats change fast, and the many different wild animals of the Miombo lands often have to move from place to place to find food and water. Miombo wildlife includes lions, cheetahs, leopards, wild dogs, buffaloes, elephants, hippopotamuses, crocodiles, rhinoceroses, waterbuck, eland, sable antelopes, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, chimpanzees, red colobus, red-tailed monkey, yellow and chacma baboons, Stierling's woodpeckers and corncrakes, not to mention the shovel-snout frogs.

**DESERTS/XERIC SCRUB:** There are extraordinary drylands and deserts in Africa, full of strange giant multicoloured sand dunes and succulent plants, which store water in their thick fleshy tissues, and grow nowhere else on earth: In the south, the Succulent Karoo, the Namib, the Nama Karoo, the Kaokoveld, and in the north, the huge expanse of the Sahara.

**HIGHLANDS** – Habitats and climate change dramatically as you go uphill. Like plants and animals found on islands in the sea, species found in isolated highlands are usually rare and found nowhere else on the planet. The forests, moorlands, grasslands and woodlands covering Africa's mountainous regions are world-famous for their biodiversity: Places like the Albertine Rift of Central Africa, the Cameroonian Highlands, the Angolan scarp, the Highveld and Drakensberg mountains of South Africa, and the Ethiopian Highlands.

**FYNBOS** – The Cape Floral Kingdom of South Africa: More species of plant live here than in any other area of the same size in Africa. Nearly 6,000 of the 8,500 plants live nowhere else. The seeds of many of these plants come to life only in the heat of dry season fires. After the fires, they resprout and flower in an explosion of colour. Because of invasion by alien plants, land development and modern fire control, 1,700 of the fynbos plant species are threatened to some extent with extinction!

