

LISSATABA TREE OF THE MONTH

March 2022



On the N1 opposite the Nyala Camp

Tree of the month: False Marula

Other names: Valsmaroela (Afr.), Ndzivata (Tsonga meaning “The tree of forgetfulness”), *Lannea schweinfurthii* var. *stuhlmannii* (Lat.), *Lannea* – Latin word for wool describing the hairy woolly surface of young leaves.

SA Tree number: 363

This deciduous tree is scattered across Lissataba and is a member of the Mango family, the fourth largest tree family in southern Africa. Several people who enjoy trees have asked where one can see and appreciate this species on Lissataba. As you cross the powerlines towards the housing section on the N1 there is a stand of these on the right hand side of the road. Heron Dam East Road is another good area as well as along the river bed that flows into Giraffe Dam. Once one has confirmed its identification you will realise the False Marula is well represented throughout the reserve.

The False Marula favours a variety of habitats from riverine bush to dry bushveld and can be found on termitaria as well as rocky outcrops.



A pair of False Marula trees flanking a termite mound adjacent to the N1 as one looks towards the Drakensberg range.

The bark of the False Marula flakes away to create a pattern of rectangular shapes. This is also true of the Marula, but the shapes created are different and the bark in the case of the False Marula has a darker grey appearance than that of the Marula. I also find that the bark of the False Marula appears slightly less 'matt' than the Marula and less uniformly grey.



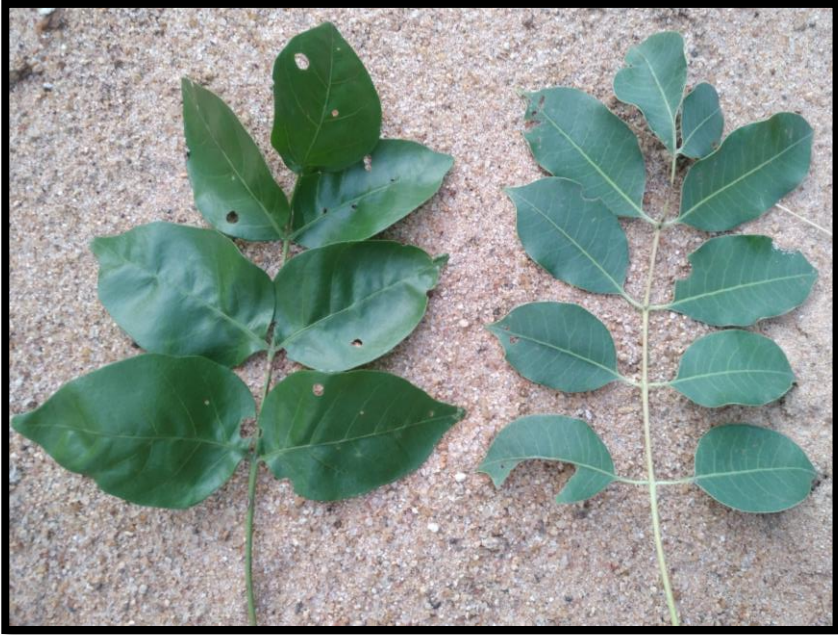
False Marula bark



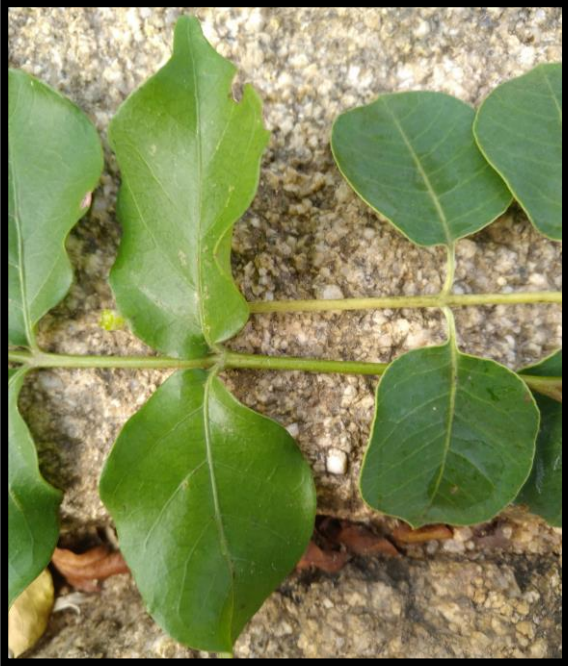
Marula bark

Interestingly, the bark can be used to tan leather as well as to make dye and the wood is used to create household utensils like spoons.

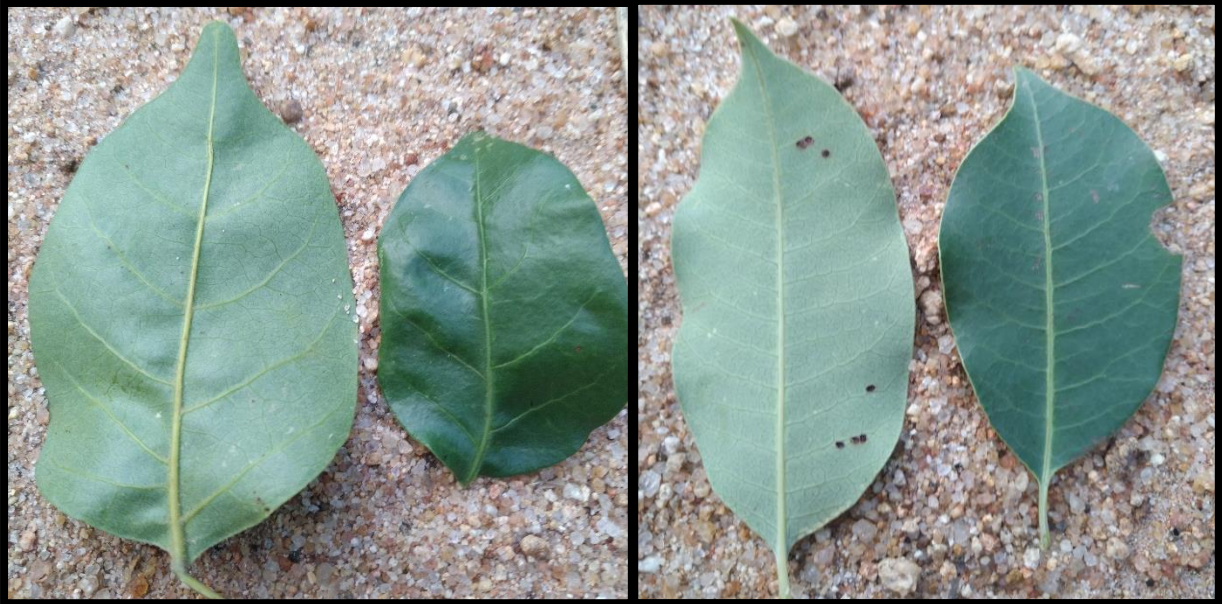
The leaves of this tree are borne in clusters at the end of the branches in a compound arrangement. A useful tip for identification is to look at the leaflets making up the compound leaf. The one at the end (the terminal leaflet) has a symmetric shape around the central leaf vein, whereas the lateral (side) leaflets are asymmetric. The leaves have a leathery texture and the leaflet stalks (petiolules) are very short to almost absent (in the case of the Marula leaflets, the petiolules are significantly longer). The leaves of the False Marula are shiny in comparison to those of the Marula and when seen next to each other, they are markedly different in appearance. In all the leaf images below, the False Marula specimen appears on the left with the Marula alternative on the right.



The compound leaflets of the two trees.



Close-up of the petiolules showing the length difference.



Close-up of the top and bottom surface of the False Marula and Marula leaflets.



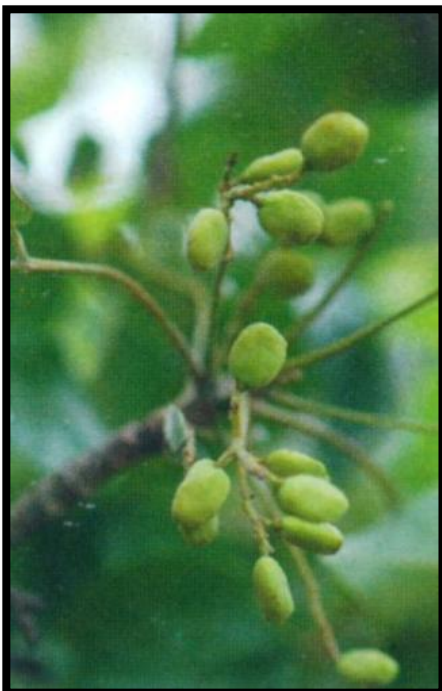
The glossy appearance of the leaves and the symmetry of the leaflets (symmetric in the terminal leaflet and asymmetric in the lateral leaflets) of the False Marula.

The male and female flowers of the False Marula appear on different trees and the flowering season is from October to January. They appear as yellow-green spikes.



Unopened flower spikes on the left and the tree in full flower on the right.

The fruit is small, oval, slightly flattened and borne in bunches on the tree. It is edible (although the skin is not eaten), reddish purple with orange flesh when ripe and tastes like mango (November – March).



Un-ripened fruit of the False Marula.

The False Marula has many uses, both economically as well as ecologically. The leaves are eaten by many browser species, including Kudu, Bushbuck and Giraffe. The tasty fruit are enjoyed by a variety of frugivorous birds, amongst them the Grey Go-away Bird and the Red-faced Mousebird. Crested Francolins and Helmeted Guineafowls also get to enjoy fallen fruit. In areas where Elephant occur, the bark, twigs and roots are eaten.

Local Cultures believe that there is a good spirit living in the tree which gives the tree the ability to protect and heal. A paste made from the leaves of the tree has been used to treat abscesses and sores and diarrhoea has also been treated with an infusion made from the roots.

Economically, this tree is used to great success as a fodder plant for cattle and game as they are able to eat the fresh or dry leaves which rescues fodder expenses in those areas where farmers grow these trees.

Ethnobotanical research conducted into the traditional uses of this tree has yielded some fascinating information. The roots of the False Marula are covered with a layer of hair-like structures, particularly where the roots meet the stem. These hairs are harvested from the tree and the resulting product, *vhulivhadza* (in Tshivenda), is sold throughout Limpopo Province at the local markets.



Vhulivhadza (root bark hairs of *Lannea* *schweinfurthii* var. *stuhlmannii*)

Vhulivhadza is considered “magical medicine” and is used to induce different types of forgetfulness or memory loss in animals and people. For example, it is reportedly able help those grieving the loss of a loved one to get over the pain of their grief. If one is in debt, it is said to be able to make the person forget you owe them anything. In another circumstance, it could also provide safety and protection by making someone forget their plans to take action against an enemy. By giving it to a new bride, the transition to her new life can be eased by helping her forget her ties to family and friends. It is also given to patients currently undergoing traditional healing to help them forget their current pain and aid the healing process. In the instance of usage with animals, it is given to newly acquired livestock to help them settle in their home by forgetting where they came from and instead forming bonds with the animals around them.

Next time you are out on Lissataba exploring its natural beauty see how many False Marula trees you can identify and maybe even sample some of the fruit if it is fruiting season.

Reference sources:

Books

Schmidt, E., Lotter, M. & McClelland, W. (2017). *Trees and Shrubs of Mpumalanga and Kruger National Park*. Jacana Media, Johannesburg.

Van Wyk, B. and van Wyk, P. (1997). *Field Guide to Trees of Southern Africa*. Struik, Cape Town.

Venter, F. & Venter, J.A. (1996). *Making the most of Indigenous Trees*. Briza, Pretoria.

Journals

Magwede, K., Ramovha, L.I., Mabogo, D.E.N., van Wyk, A.E. & van Wyk, B.E. (2019). Traditional uses of the remarkable root bark hairs of *Lannea schweinfurthii* var. *stuhlmannii* (Anacardiaceae) by the Vavenda, South Africa. South African Journal of Botany Vol 122, pgs 529 – 534.

Websites:

<http://pza.sanbi.org/lannea-schweinfurthii-var-stuhlmannii>

Photo credit for the image of the False Marula flowering tree and fruit to the following websites respectively:

<http://pza.sanbi.org/lannea-schweinfurthii-var-stuhlmannii>

<https://casabio.org/taxa/lannea>

Photo credit for the image of *vhulivhadza*:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sajb.2019.02.013>

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