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Notes on Indigenous Trees and Shrubs of S. Rhodesia

Erythrina caffra Thunb.
(Papilionaceae)

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Erythrina caffra Thunb.

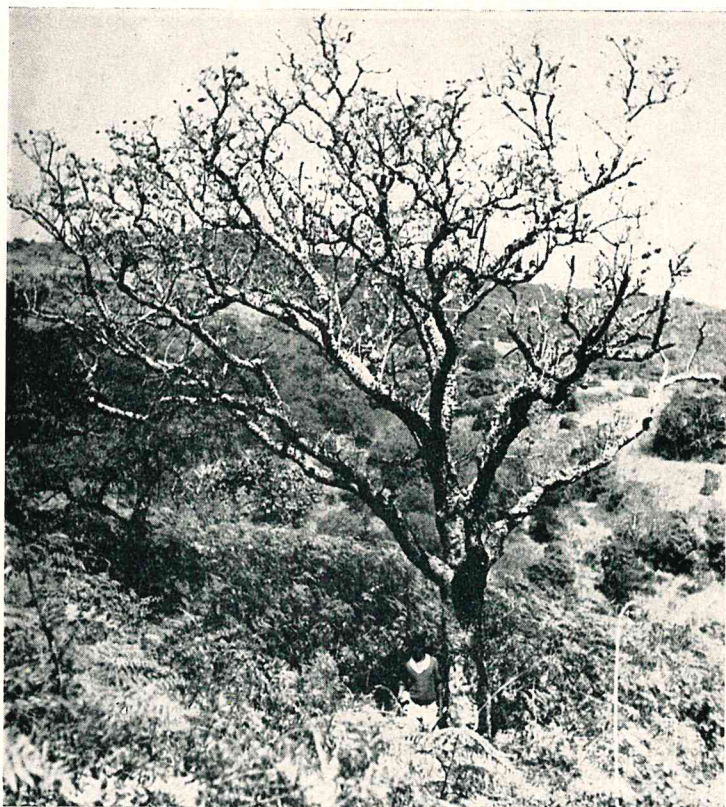
(Papilionaceae)

Common Name: Eastern Border Kaffirboom. **Native Names:** Murungu, musintsana, mutiti, mutzozo (Chis.).

General Description: This is a deciduous tree which grows to a height of 30 to 40 feet and is a lovely sight when flowering. The leaves, which are clustered at the ends of the branches, are alternate, 3-foliolate and stipulate. The leaf-stalks are up to about 5 inches in length and usually have no prickles. There are three broadly-ovate leaflets without indentations, the terminal leaflet being slightly larger than the other two. They are hairless and of thin texture with veins projecting on both surfaces but being particularly conspicuous on lower surfaces. Each leaflet has a broad, rounded base and tapers to a pointed tip. Each leaf has two small glands on the stalk near the junction of the two lateral leaflets. The flowers, which are to be seen as new leaves are commencing to appear during August and September, are very striking. The inflorescence is a many-flowered raceme or spike about 9 inches long, about half this length being the spike stalk. The flowers are large and of a scarlet colour. The pods are long, black, thin and of a somewhat papery texture. They are markedly constricted between the seeds. The seeds are small, bright red, shiny beans which are said to contain a poison which causes paralysis. The bark is green with distinctive markings. The trunk, branches and twigs all have sharp prickles.

Distribution: This kaffirboom occurs in the Eastern Border area of this Colony. It also is found elsewhere in Africa as far north as Tanganyika and as far south as the Cape Province.

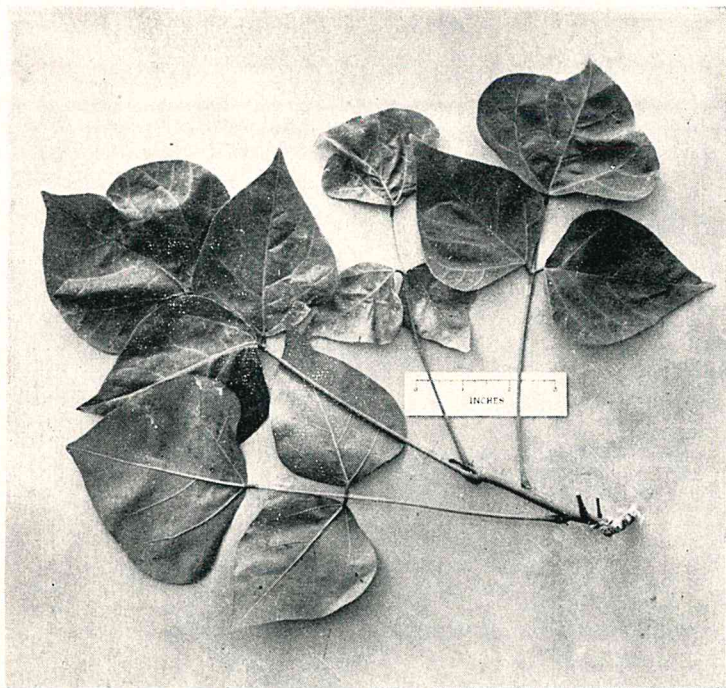
Uses: The wood is soft, light and of little use. It is sometimes used as brake blocks and may be used by natives for mortars and drums. Natives make use of the tree for medicinal purposes. It makes an attractive ornamental tree and can be very easily propagated from seed or truncheons. Truncheons about 6 feet long and 3 inches in diameter should be planted about 18 inches deep in prepared ground just before the tree comes into leaf. It is advisable to give an occasional heavy watering until the truncheons have rooted. Provided satisfactory growth is being made, flowering may possibly commence during the first year. Birds, such as Redwing Starlings and Sunbirds, may be seen obtaining nectar from the flowers.



Erythrina caffra

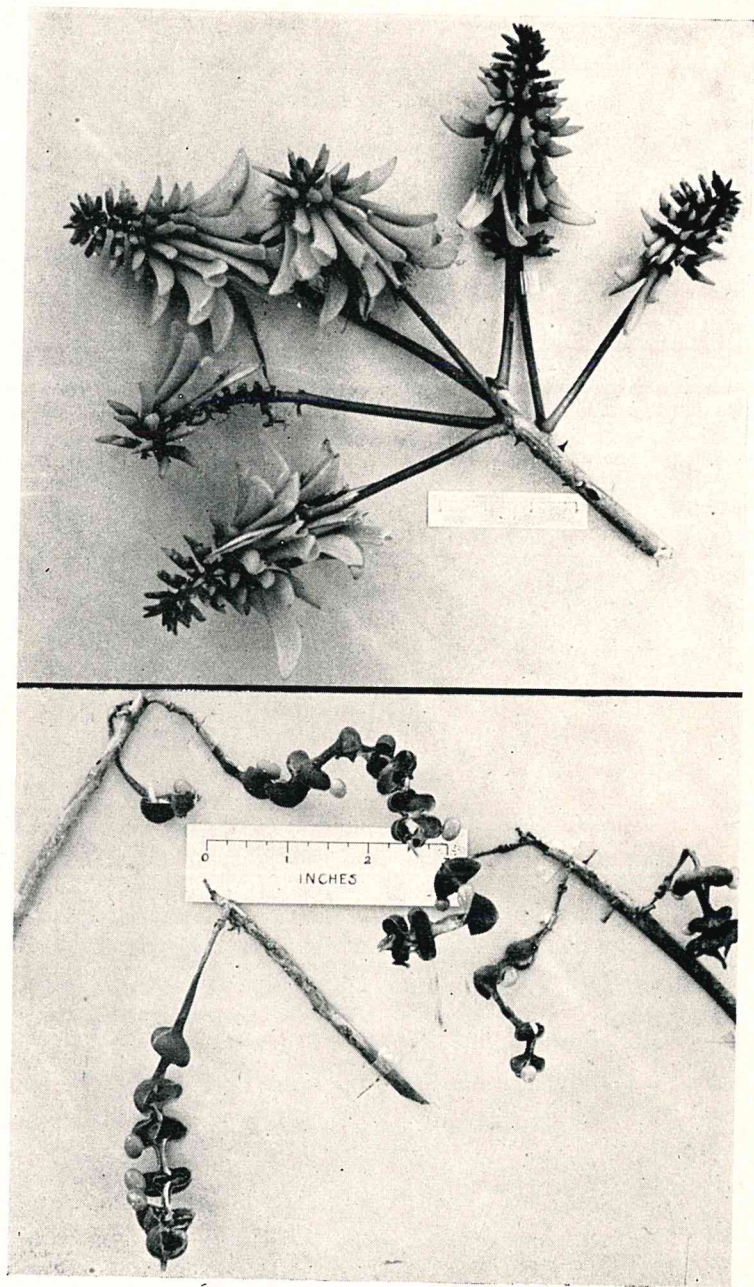
Habit photo of leafless tree coming into flower

[Photo by F. B. Armitage



Erythrina caffra
Leaves

[Photo by A. A. Pardy



Erythrina caffra
Flowers, pods and seeds

[Photo by A. A. Pardy