

(Reprinted from "Rhodesia Agricultural Journal")

Vol. 51, No. 6

November-December, 1954

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ISSUED BY AUTHORITY OF

The Minister of Agriculture and Lands

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## Notes on Indigenous Trees and Shrubs of S. Rhodesia

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*Spirostachys africana* Sond.  
(Euphorbiaceae)

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By A. A. PARDY, Chief Research Officer, Forestry Commission.

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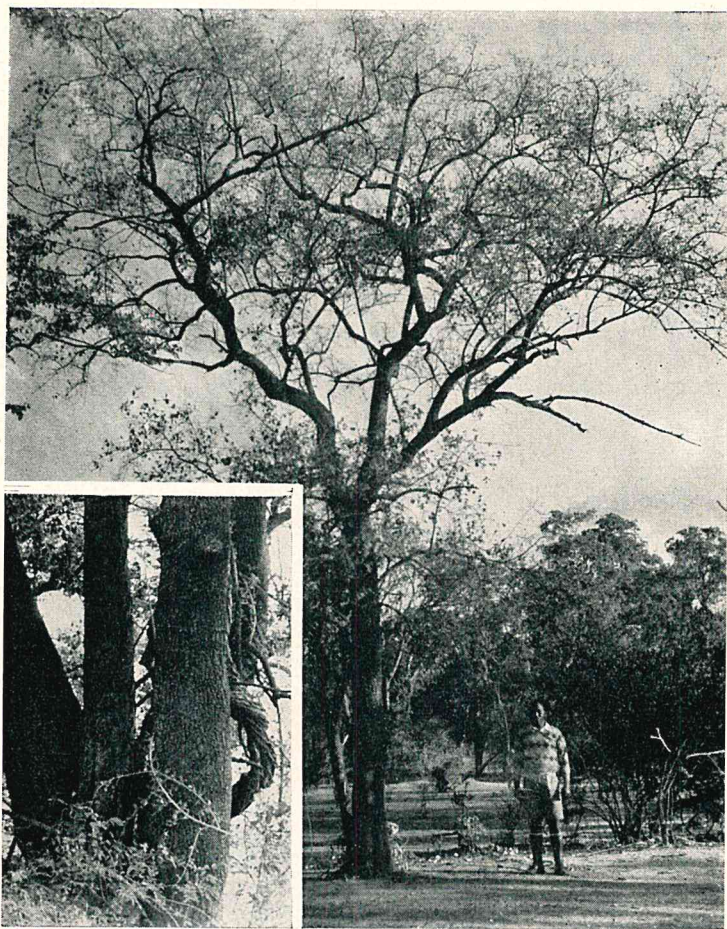
**Spirostachys africana** Sond.  
(Euphorbiaceae)

**Common Names.**—African sandalwood, Tambootie. **Native Names.**—Mutivoti, mutomboti (Chis.); ubande (Sind.).

**General Description.**—The tambootie is a deciduous tree attaining to a height of about 50 feet but is usually smaller. Exceptionally, diameters may be up to about 3 feet. It is usually gregarious, i.e. a number of trees grow in fairly close proximity to each other. The leaves are simple and alternate, with small rounded teeth along their margins. There are minute stipules which soon fall off. The shiny leaves, about 2 inches in length and with leaf-stalks about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long, are of an oval shape with rounded or bluntly pointed tips. Midribs are prominent on the lower surfaces. There are two small glands on the upper surfaces at the junction of the leaf-stalk and blade. Leaves become a reddish colour before they fall. The flowers, which are separately male and female on the same tree, appear towards the end of the dry season and usually before the new leaves appear. The catkin-like spikes of small male flowers about an inch in length are brownish and twig-like before they open. One and sometimes up to three shortly-stalked female flowers appear at the bases of the spikes. There are no sepals and petals. The fruit is a small, dry, two- or three-lobed capsule which explodes when ripe about the end of the year. There are sometimes insects in the seeds causing them to make small jumps. The bark is rough and nearly black and characteristically consists of small more or less rectangular sections. The sap is milky and poisonous and very dangerous to the eyes as it can cause blindness.

**Distribution.**—This tree, which is not common, occurs in dry regions of the low-veld, e.g. in the south-eastern corner of the Colony, in the lower Shangani River area and some 60 miles to the north-west of Hartley, and is commonly found in association with mopani. Larger trees are usually to be seen on river banks. It also occurs in adjoining territories.

**Uses.**—The heartwood, of a dark-brown colour streaked with black and somewhat oily, is hard, heavy and durable. The sapwood is white. Its air dry weight is about 63 lb. per cubic foot. It is not difficult to saw and plane and turns well. Its sawdust is very dangerous to the eyes and may even cause blindness. It also affects throat and stomach. It has a strong, pleasant scent reminiscent of sandalwood but somewhat sweeter. On account of defects such as hollow centres, boards are usually small. It seasons slowly. It is sought after for furniture and is useful for small, fancy articles. Natives use it for making beads. Pieces of African Sandalwood obtained from the Zimbabwe ruins were sent overseas by the Bulawayo Museum authorities about two years ago for determination of age tests. Tests by different methods in Britain and America gave results varying from 1,240 ( $\pm 90$ )—1,530 ( $\pm 350$ ) years. Natives make use of the tree medicinally, and are reported to use the bark as a fish poison. An observer remarks that animals do not touch it and that it would almost seem to be shunned by birds.

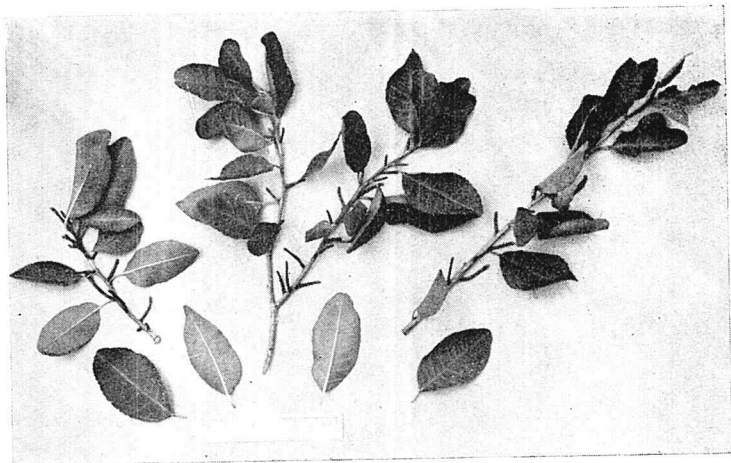


*Spirostachys africana.*

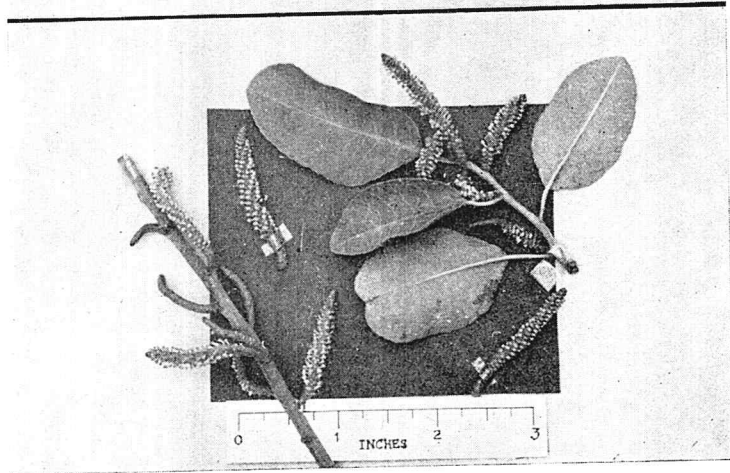
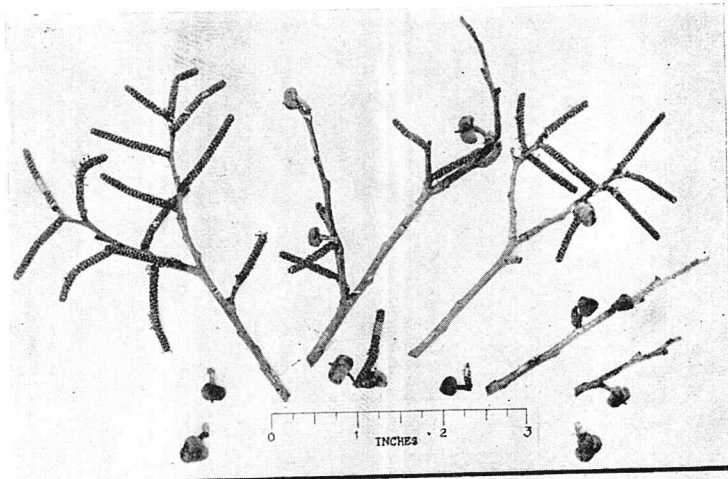
Habit photo of an almost leafless tree. Inset photo shows bark of stems which are up to 2ft. 11in. diameter at breast height.

[Habit photo by R. M. Davies

[Inset photo by D. T. Carter



*Spirostachys africana.*  
Leaves and young spikes of flowers.  
[Photo by A. A. Pardy]



*Spirostachys africana.*  
Upper photograph shows twigs with spikes of male flowers  
commencing to open and also female flowers and young  
fruits. Lower photograph shows twigs with leaves and male  
flowers open.  
[Photo by A. A. Pardy]