

Flora at Plettenberg Bay Game Reserve

- **Black ironwood, *Olea laurifolia***, is a species of flowering plant belonging to the olive family Oleaceae. The Guinness Book of World Records lists this tree as the world's heaviest wood, with a specific gravity of 1.49. The timber has a good abrasion resistance and is very strong. It is an excellent turnery wood and is used for a wide range of decorative items.
- **Cape Floral Kingdom**, the smallest but richest of the world's six floral kingdoms. It is home to more types of indigenous plants than any other similar sized area on Earth. At least 70% of the 9 600 plant species of the Cape Floral Kingdom are not found anywhere else in the world. Major threats to this floristic region include loss of habitat to agriculture, rapid and insensitive development, the overexploitation of marine resources and wild flowers, and the spread of alien species. At least 1 400 plant species are now endangered or close to extinction.

Fynbos is the major vegetation type and the region has the highest known concentration of plant species in the world with 1300 per 10000 km²! The nearest rival, the South American rain forest has a concentration of only 400 per 10000 km² world. The fynbos in the western regions is more rich and varied than in the eastern regions of South Africa. The diversity of fynbos plants is greater than that of the tropical rainforests, with over 9000 species of plants occurring in the area, around 6200 of which are endemic, i.e. do not occur anywhere else in the world. Of the *Ericas*, 600 occur in the fynbos kingdom, while only 26 are found in the rest of the world.

This is in an area of 46,000 km² - by comparison, the Netherlands, with an area of 33,000 km², has 1400 species, none of them endemic. Table Mountain in Cape Town supports 2200 species, more than the entire United Kingdom. Thus although the fynbos comprises only 6% of the area of southern Africa it has half the species on the subcontinent, and in fact has almost 1 in 5 of all plant species in Africa.

- **Honeybush, *Cyclopia* spp.**, is commonly used to make a tea infusion. It grows only in a small area in the southwest of South Africa in the Langkloof area of the Eastern Cape and shares many similarities with rooibos. So named because the flowers smell of honey, the taste is similar to that of rooibos only sweeter. There are 23 species of honeybush tea found in the wild, of which mainly 4 are used for commercial use. Honeybush contains virtually no caffeine and is low in tannin.
- **Keurbooms tree, *Virgilia***, is a genus of Southern African trees in the family Fabaceae with shiny to hairy pinnate leaves and attractive mauve to pink pea-shaped flowers followed by leathery pods. They are valued as useful ornamental trees by gardeners, particularly the well-known species *Virgilia divaricata* - Tree in a hurry, Cape lilac, blossom tree - and *Virgilia capensis* - Pink Blossom Tree - despite having a comparatively short life of 15 years. In well-drained soils some species will grow 2 m in the first season. They tolerate wind and have dense foliage growing close to the ground, so they are useful as pioneer species for privacy and wind protection. The common Afrikaans name, keurboom, means 'choice tree'.
- **Real yellowwood, or broad-leaved yellowwood, *Podocarpus latifolius***, is primeval and has been present in this part of Africa for more than 100 million years. The species is widespread and is found from Table Mountain, along the southern and eastern Cape coast, in the ravines of the Drakensberg up to the Soutpansberg and the Blouberg in Limpopo. In forests, they can grow up to 40 m in height with the base of the trunk sometimes up to 3 m in diameter. In contrast, trees that grow in unsheltered places like mountain-slopes, are often short, bushy and gnarled. The bark of the real yellowwood is khaki-coloured to grey when it is old, deeply split and peels off in strips. The crown is relatively small in relation to its height and is often covered with grey lichen. Male and female cones resemble pine cones and are white, light green or pink. The female cone has a fleshy podocarpium on which the seed, which takes on the shape and colour of a cherry develops.
- **Rooibos, *Aspalathus linearis*, Afrikaans for 'red bush'**, is a broom-like plant used to make a popular brand of tea which has been drunk in South Africa for generations and is now consumed in many other countries. Grown only in a small area in the Cedarberg of the Western Cape, it is popular amongst health-conscious consumers, due to its high level of antioxidants such as aspalathin and nothofagin, no caffeine, and its low tannin levels.
- **Stinkwood tree, *Ocotea bullata***, native to South Africa, it is an evergreen tree that grows up to 30 m tall. The leaves are dark green and glossy, with bubbles or blisters (bullae) produced on the upper surface of the leaves, hence the specific name bullata. Other names are Cape walnut, stinkhout, Cape laurel and laurel wood. It derives its name from having a strong and unpleasant smell when freshly felled. The tree yields a beautiful timber much prized by cabinet-makers. The wood is dark walnut or reddish brown to black with a yellow sap-wood, and the grain extremely fine, close, dense and smooth. It is said to be as durable as teak. The tree has been badly exploited and the wood is no longer available commercially.