



The rich pickings offered by the luscious sycamore fig frequently invite mixed feeding parties.

Sycamore fig

Ficus sycomorus

Birds and bats, bushpigs and porcupines, warthogs and antelope, rhinos, bushbabies and civets all love the fruit of the sycamore fig. Of all the fruit-eating animals drawn to these impressive trees along river courses in warm climates, the parrot-like African green pigeon is possibly the most conspicuous.

Some folks call the sycamore the queen of trees, others claim that it comes straight out of a fairy tale. With its massive evergreen canopy and single golden trunk that splits into multiple stems or buttresses, the sycamore fig is indeed iconic. A circumference of 20 metres, often richly folded, is not uncommon. The best known of all wild figs, it provides an idyllic setting for sundowners. The magnificent specimens in the riverine setting of Skukuza Rest Camp in Kruger, with their



attendant flocks of green pigeons, are much admired and photographed, and some are illuminated at night.

Humans are unlikely to feast on the sweet-smelling figs, which are mostly wasp-infested. The size of a marble, they are smaller and harder than commercially grown specimens. Hundreds of flowers are pollinated inside the urn-shaped receptacle by miniscule female wasps that enter and exit through small openings and mate with wingless male wasps, which spend their entire lives inside the fig.

In contrast with its smooth bark, the large, rounded oval leaves are rather coarse, like a cat's tongue. They make good forage. All parts of the tree produce a sticky, milky latex, traditionally used to trap birds.

The soft wood lends itself to shaping dugout canoes or drums, even coffins. 🐾

Velvety figs ripen in dense clusters throughout the year.

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ILLUSTRATION BY DALEEN ROOST