

# *Tapinanthus oliefolius*

## Mistletoe

**Family:** Loranthaceae (Mistletoe family)



### Collection Number:

**Description:** A semi-parasite growing on a variety of hosts. The stems are woody and roots are modified to penetrate the bark of the plant on which it grows. The plant is evergreen, leaves are simple, ovate to elliptic and dull, olive green. The flowers and fruit are both bright red.

**Habitat:** *Tapinanthus* is very common throughout Namibia and there is plenty on the nature reserve. It can be best seen in the riverbed south of Wolwedans house, where it parasitises *Parkinsonia africana* (Wild green hair tree).

**General information:** Mistletoe is an epiphytic parasite, i.e. it attaches itself to the branches of the host plant. It is also a hemiparasite. This means that it is dependant on the host plant for water and minerals, but can manufacture food itself. The plant contains chlorophyll (hence the green appearance) and is able to photosynthesise. (See glossary). In order to obtain water and nutrients from the host plant, it has modified roots called haustorial roots and their main function is to penetrate the stem of the host plant and "suck up" water and minerals. The point of attachment, where the parasite's tissue develops within the host is called a haustorium. The woody remains of parasitic attachments can often be seen in the field and there are some good examples in the *Parkinsonia africana* in the riverbed at Wolwedans. It is interesting to note that parasitism has in some cases been so extreme that it has killed the trees.

Birds are the main dispersal agents and are attracted to the brightly coloured berries. Some birds eat the berries and seeds; some birds only peck at the berries but the