



Fig. 1. The exploded capsule, and the winged seed. (Suzanne Carter)

Mofu (*Entandrophragma devevayi*) is the tallest indigenous tree species of the Zambia plateau. It is widely distributed in northern Zambia, reaching as far south as Mumbwa District in Chief Chibuluma's area, not far from the Kafue Flats. It occurs as an emergent in dry-evergreen forest patches, and will also invade fire protected miombo woodland.

The best known example in Zambia was the tree on the central reservation of the dual carriageway, a short distance from Ndola on the road to Kitwe. It was declared a National Monument and a fence was erected around it to discourage



Fig. 2. Leaves and flowers. (Suzanne Carter)

Fig. 3 The famous National Monument near Ndola, photo by Mike Bingham, 17th November 1974.



people from removing patches of bark for traditional medicine. A plaque with a poem pleading for the axeman to spare the tree was placed at its base. On a recent visit to the Copperbelt I found the tree fallen, and being cut up for firewood. Friends in Kitwe told me that it fell in June. It would be a pity if the demise of this iconic landmark passed without some sort of tribute.

The genus *Entandrophragma* belongs to the mahogany family, Meliaceae. The wood is straight-grained but weak, and tends to shatter when the tree is felled. I have seen several trees felled and then abandoned. If appropriate tackle had been used to lower the tree gently, the timber could have been saved. Nor have many of the fine specimens which once adorned the suburbs of Ndola been spared.

Many planted specimens are to be seen around Lusaka, for example at the exit from the Lusaka Sports Club, lining Ng'umbo Road and near St Ignatius Church. These were already mature when we came to Lusaka in 1966, and were probably planted in the 1950s. In fact, there are far more of these trees to be seen in Lusaka's avenues than survive in their native Ndola. Trees which I planted around 1985 produced seed for the first time this year.

The tree flowers in October-November and the woody capsules mature in August-September. Fresh seed germinates readily without treatment, and the tree is quick growing. Unlike the more commonly planted mululu (*Khaya anthotheca*), it does not have a wide spreading crown, and is thus more suitable for planting in confined spaces.

After seeing the fate of the national monument tree I sent seed collected from the Lusaka Club to my Copperbelt friends. Maybe that enterprising horticulturist who, all those years ago, brought seed from Ndola to grow in Lusaka, would be pleased to know that the progeny of his plantings may produce the next generation of seed to repopulate the depleted Copperbelt. ☺

