

Science is all around you: "Higüero de sierra", A Puerto Rican Endemic Plant ^[1]

Submitted by [José R Almodóvar](#) ^[2] on 27 November 2013 - 8:43pm



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José: "Greetchen, our guest today is [Omar Monsegur](#) ^[3], a biologist graduated from the [University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez](#) ^[4] and who works for the Federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ([USFWS](#) ^[5]). Omar specializes in endemic plants and endangered species, and today he shares a beautiful photo of a flower

from an endemic [6] plant to Puerto Rico, named Crescentia portoricensis [7] or better known as the "Higüero de sierra."



Bell-shaped flower of the endemic plant "Higüero de sierra". Photo Omar Monsegur, MSc.

Greetchen: "What a beautiful flower, the morphology is very unique! Omar, to what family does this flower belongs? "

Omar: " The "Higüero de sierra" belongs to the Bignoniaceae [8] family. Same as the native oak or white oak Tabebuia heterophylla [9]. In Puerto Rico there are at least four species of Tabebuia that are native or endemic . If you look carefully, you will see that the oaks and fig trees have bell-shaped flowers."

José: "What characterizes this family in terms of floral morphology?"

Omar: " The flowers in this family are zygomorphic ^[10] (there is only one point where it can be divided into equal halves) and perfect (have both male and female parts on the same flower). These flowers are usually large, colorful and fragrant. "

Greetchen: "Interesting , what else can you tell us about this beautiful flower and its fruit? Does the plant blooms all year long?"

Omar: "Flowers are about 4 inches long, pale green and have a foul odor or stinky. It is believed that the flowers can be pollinated by bats and the fruits are cylindrical. The specie blooms sporadically throughout the year, but shows a peak in flower production throughout December, January and February."

José: " Did you know of any importance or particular use for this plant? "

Omar: " A traditional use for this specie is unknown. The real value of this specie lies in being a unique specie of Puerto Rico and is probably evolutionarily related to some endemic pollinator. So if we lose the "Higüero de sierra" there is the possibility to lose the pollinator."

Greetchen: "Where can we find this flower?"

Omar: " The "Higüero de sierra" is endemic to humid forests with serpentine soils ^[11]. They are historically considered endemic to Maricao and Susua forrests . Within these forests, the plant grows mainly along rivers and streams. "

Greetchen: "Is this specie endangered?"

Omar: " The "Higüero de sierra" was listed by the USFWS as an endangered specie in 1991. It is believed that the specie was affected by deforestation related to agricultural development and erosion along rivers and streams. At present, the species is threatened by the lack of recruitment (absence of seedlings and juvenile stages in the wild)."

José: " Is there any effort to recover this endangered specie? "

Omar: "The primary recovery activity involves the propagation of the specie . Future plans are to spread selected material and increase wild populations of the species. In this way we will ensure that populations are less vulnerable to extinction. Another important aspect is the establishment of a long term monitoring plan. "

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Crescentia portoricensis (USDA) ^[16]

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