**Phyllanthus chacoensis** (Phyllanthaceae): new record for the Brazilian Amazon and its lectotypification

Jone Clebson Ribeiro MENDES¹, Ricardo de S. SECCO², Sarah Maria ATHIÊ-SOUZA¹*, Margareth Ferreira de SALES¹

¹ Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Biodiversidade, Av. Dom Manual de Medeiros, s/n, Dois Irmãos, CEP 521.719-30, Recife, PE, Brazil

² Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Coordenação de Botânica, Terra Firme, Av. Perimetral 1901, CEP 66040-170, Belém, PA, Brazil

* Corresponding author: sarah_athie@yahoo.com.br; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6090-981X

**ABSTRACT**

The first record of *Phyllanthus chacoensis* for the Brazilian Amazon is presented, based on a specimen from Rondônia state. The species can be recognized by its cauliflorous inflorescence, staminate and pistillate flowers with 4 sepals, devoid of a floral disk, 4 stamens, 2-carpellary ovary, drupaceous, ellipsoidal fruits, with one seed per locule. The species was previously known only from the central-western and northeastern regions of the Caatinga and Pantanal domains in Brazil. We provide a list of synonyms, a detailed description, an updated geographic distribution map in Brazil, data on habitat and conservation status, illustrations of its reproductive characters, and detailed photographs. We also propose a lectotype for the species.

**KEYWORDS:** Neotropics, nomenclature, northern Brazil, taxonomy

**INTRODUCTION**

The Amazonian lowland rainforest is home to almost 190 plant families, of which Phyllanthaceae is represented by 55 species from eight genera (*Amanoa* Aubl., *Chonocentrum* Pierre ex Pax & K.Hoffm., *Didymocistus* Klotzsch, *Heronima* Allemão, *Jablonskia* G.L.Webster, *Margaritaria* L.f., *Phyllanthus* L., and *Richeria* Vahl) (Cardoso et al. 2017; Flora do Brasil 2020 [under construction]). The Brazilian Amazon is the third biome in terms of *Phyllanthus* diversity, with 33 species, after the Atlantic Forest (52 species) and Cerrado (43) (Flora do Brasil 2020 [under construction]). *Phyllanthus* has a cosmopolitan distribution, with 880 species globally, of which over 200 occur in the Neotropics; 90 to 110 species have been recorded for Brazil in all vegetation types (Webster 2002; Kathriarachchi *et al.* 2006; Silva and Sales 2007; Bouman *et al.* 2018; Flora do Brasil 2020 [under construction]).

The species richness of the genus in Brazil is almost certainly underestimated, since the last major revision was published in the Flora Brasiliensis by Müller Argoviensis in 1873 and included 71 species. More recently, floristic studies by Webster (2002) and Silva and Sales (2007) made important contributions to the understanding of the morphology of several taxa. The floristic knowledge of the Amazon basin is even more precarious, as pointed out by Hopkins (2005) and Ter Steege *et al.* (2013) and, consequently, the diversity of *Phyllanthus* in the region is probably underestimated, as exemplified here with the recognition of a new record of a
Phyllanthus tree species in the Brazilian Amazon, Phyllanthus chacoensis Morong.

Taxonomic advances in the Amazon region are hampered by low numbers of herbaria and deposited specimens, low collection rates, and relatively few specialized taxonomists (Barbosa et al. 2003), which helps explain the relatively few studies and the low capacity for determining the real diversity of Phyllanthus (e.g., Rodrigues 1971; Webster 2004; Secco 2013; Secco and Rosário 2015; Secco and Silveira 2016). Additionally, Phyllanthus is one of the most morphologically complex groups of Phyllanthaceae due to its variable habits (herbs to trees), phyllanthoid or non-phyllanthoid branching, and tiny gamosepalous pistillate flowers with disks commonly entire, and disks segmented and alternipetalous in staminate flowers (Silva and Sales 2004, 2007).

As a result of increased collection efforts and extensive analyses of herbarium specimens as part of a revision of Phyllanthus conducted by the first author, an indeterminate specimen (with duplicates deposited at INPA, NY and RB herbaria) that had been collected 58 years ago in what is now Rondônia state (northern Brazil) was encountered. We identified the collection as *P. chacoensis*, representing a new record for the Amazonian flora. In addition to the description of the new record, we propose its lectotypification and discuss its conservation status.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Specimens of *Phyllanthus chacoensis* deposited in collections at the INPA, NY and RB herbaria were identified based on the types stored at CORD, F, G, GH, K, MICH, MO, MPU, NDG, NY, P, PH, UC and US (acronyms according to Thiers 2020, updated continuously) and compared with information published by Silva and Sales (2007, 2008) and Melo et al. (2013). Data concerning their geographic distributions were obtained from herbarium labels and from the aforementioned literature. The descriptive terminology follows Silva and Sales (2007), complemented by Radford et al. (1974). The typification was based on the rules of International Nomenclature (Turland et al. 2018). Maps were prepared using QGIS 2.3 software, based on data from geographic coordinates from herbarium labels, or estimated from locality data. The conservation status of the species was reevaluated according to the IUCN methodology and the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria (IUCN 2012), using the Geocat web tool (http://geocat.kew.org/), following Bachman et al. (2011).

**RESULTS**


Tree 2–6 m high (Figure 1a), monoecious. Branching phyllanthoid, glabrous, reddish; branches 6–20 cm long, angular, lenticellate, brown. Capathylls ca. 2 mm long, widely triangular, membranous; cataphyllary stipules, triangular-ovate, ca. 1.5 mm long, with fimbriate margins. Stipules 1–1.5 mm long, triangular, margins fimbriate. Petiole ca. 2 mm long, glabrous. Leaf blade 1.5–2.5 × 1–2.5 cm (Figure 1b), green-opaque, chartaceous, widely elliptic to orbicular or obovate; base obtuse; apex rounded to retuse; glabrous; margins slightly denticulate, with the presence of glands in the indentations; venation brochidodromous. Inflorescences cauliflorous, 3–4 cm long, thyrsiform (Figure 1c, d), unisexual, peduncle ca. 4 mm long, glabrous; stamine thyrse 9 to 12-cymules, each cymule with 3 flowers; pistillate thyrse with 8–10 cymes, each cymule with 1 to 2-flowers; stamine and pistillate cymes each subtended by a bract, oval-deltoïd, acuminate, each flower surrounded by a lanceolate bracteole. Stamine flowers (Figure 1f), ca. 2 mm long, pinkish or green; pedicel 1–2 mm long, glabrous; sepals 4, 1–1.5 mm long, oblong-ovatulate, rounded at the apex, margins entire to slightly fimbriate; disk absent; stamens 4, subsessile, free, anthers oblong, vertically dehiscent. Pistillate flowers (Figure 1g), 1–2 mm long, pinkish or green; pedicel ca. 3 mm long, glabrous; sepals 4, 0.8–1.5 mm long, oblong-spulate, rounded at the apex, margins entire to slightly fimbriate; disk absent; ovary ca. 0.6–0.8 mm long, ellipsoid, reddish; 2-locular, with 1 ovule per locule; styles connate at the base, deeply bifid, curved downward. Fruits drupaceous, 6–8 × 4–5.2 mm (Figure 1h), green, ellipsoid, with sepals and styles persistent; fruit pedicle 4–6 mm long. Seeds 3–5 × ca. 4 mm, subglobose, grayish-brown, smooth to slightly wrinkled.

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**Distribution and habitat**: Exclusive to South America, recorded in Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. In Brazil, it was previously known from northeastern (Alagoas, Bahia, Pernambuco, Sergipe) and midwestern (Mato Grosso do Sul) states (Lourteig and O’Donell 1942; Silva and Sales 2007; Secco et al. 2018, Flora do Brasil 2020 [under construction]). The distribution of *P. chacoensis* is expanded here to the northern region of that country (the Brazilian Amazon; Figure 2). The new record was found along the margins of an *igapó* (seasonally inundated forest), which confirms the species’ preference for swamplike or riparian environments.

**Conservation status**: According to IUCN (2012) criteria, the species is classified as endangered (EN) - ENB1ac (iii), as it has an extent of occurrence (EOO) of 204,000 km² (including the new record). *Phyllanthus chacoensis* should therefore be the target of collection efforts to assist in the selection of priority areas for its conservation. Most of the collected specimens in

![Image of Phyllanthus chacoensis](image-url)
Brazil were encountered in riparian vegetation, such as along
the banks of the São Francisco River (northeastern region),
the Paraguay River (midwestern region), and Guaporé River
(northern region), which suffer from constant anthropic
impacts, including dense urban occupation and the discharge
of untreated domestic sewage, resulting in biodiversity loss.

Taxonomic notes: Thomas Morong (1892) described
Phyllanthus chacoensis based on syntypes “In the Gran Chaco,
opposite Asuncion (355) = Balansa 1712, Fendler Panama 140,
Fendler 323”. The collection Morong 355 is the most likely to
have been used by the author in the description. However,
four specimens were found in the author’s main herbarium
(NY). The material selected as a lectotype is deposited
under registration (NY00273054; Figure 3), as it is the best
conserved and has flowers of both sexes.

DISCUSSION

The Amazon region represents a distinct phytogeographic
province characterized by a humid tropical forest of enormous
biomass, heterogeneity, and diversity (Braga 1979). Collection
efforts such as the “Projeto Flora Amazônica (CNPq/NSF)”,
initiated in 1976 (Secco 2018), have made significant progress
in increasing our knowledge of the flora of the Brazilian
Amazon, with many expeditions and a large number of plant
specimens deposited in regional herbaria (with duplicates
distributed among national and international herbaria).
However, considering the extent of the region, the collection
rate in the region is still the lowest in Brazil (Hopkins 2019).
The new record of *P. chacoensis* for the Brazilian Amazon
reinforces the importance of these botanical collections, as
the species had not been collected in the region since 1962.
We have not found any more recent collection in the region.
However, collections of *P. chacoensis* are much more numerous
in northeastern and central-western Brazil (ca. 33 and six
specimens respectively), collected since 1984.

*Phyllanthus chacoensis* is the only species in the subsection
Aporosella (Chodat) G.L.Webster (*P*. sect. Cicca (L.) Müll.Arg,
and *P*. subg. Karganelia (A.Juss.) Kurz) (Webster 1957, 2001;
Bouman et al. 2018), and can be differentiated from other
Brazilian species by the absence of a floral disk in staminate
and pistillate flowers, and by having four sepals and stamens,
cauliflorous inflorescences, a 2-carpellar ovary, and fruits
with one seed per locule (Silva and Sales 2007; Melo et al.
2013).

*Phyllanthus chacoensis* is morphologically similar to
*P. elsiae* Urb., which is found in Argentina (Silva and Sales
2007), although the former can be distinguished by being
monoecious (vs dioecious in *P. elsiae*), by having a 2-locular
ovary (vs 3-locular), styles deeply 2-fid, curved downwards
(vs joined in a column and descending) and ellipsoidal fruits
(vs oblate-spheroidal).

CONCLUSIONS

A new record of *Phyllanthus chacoensis* in the Brazilian
Amazon expands the distribution of the species in Brazil and
confirms its preference for swampy habitats close to water
bodies. It also reinforces the need for investments in botanical
collections in northern Brazil, especially in the Amazon region,
as well as the training of specialized human resources, as the

![Figure 2. Geographic distribution of Phyllanthus chacoensis in Brazil, including the new record. This figure is in color in the electronic version.](image-url)
The specimen examined here had lain for more than 50 years in a herbarium without being identified. The conservation status of *P. chacoensis*, associated with its occurrence in highly threatened sites, indicates the need to protect this species.

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