

## S U M M A R Y

*Peltogyne* is a genus of the subfamily *Caesalpinioideae* (*Leguminosae*) in the tribe *Amherstiae*. This genus occupies an important place among the other representative trees of the Amazon area because of this frequent occurrence and exceptional development in tropical América. Its valuable wood, which is violet or purple in colour, gives the genus its local name "purpleheart" (pau roxo).

Some species have studied phytochemically by other workers, and among important substances, one with antimicrobial properties was found in *Peltogyne recifensis*.

At present the genus has 23 known species that occur from México through Central América, Panamá to the Southeast of South América. The Amazon region is the center of its distribution. The genera *Hymenaea* and *Cynometra* have the same center of distribution, the Central Amazonia.

*Hymenaea* and *Peltogyne* have great morphological similarity, but are diverse in the geographical limits of their distribution. *Hymenaea* has a striking disjunction in distribution between the African and South América continents; *Peltogyne* is distributed continuously from the Caribbean region through Central América to the Southeastern region of South American continent. These *taxa* were relicts of the time when the Amazonian evergreen forest was more extensive than it is

today. It is probable that *Peltogyne*, *Hymenaea* and *Cynometra* could have migrated to the North of South América into Central América, too.

Phytogeographically, the genus *Peltogyne* occurs in many kinds of habitats. For example *P. catingae* subsp. *catingae* is typical of the "catinga" of the Rio Negro (Amazonas), while *P. catingae* subsp. *glabra* is found well developed in the high forest near Manaus. This shows the great adaptability of the specie to different ecological habitats.

After the original description of the genus *Peltogyne* by Vogel (1837), the first study of the genus was Bentham's (1870) and the last was Ducke's (1938) in which only the Amazonian species are treated.

Actually we found after consulting a large representative collection of herbarium material (Colombia, Venezuela, Panamá, Suriname, México, Brasil, etc.) that it was not possible to base, some taxonomic decisions on specimens from such a restricted area as Amazonia, but that a much wider geographical view must be taken.

The genus *Peltogyne* previously had a total of 29 recognised species. These are now reduced here to 23 species, including 2 new species, 3 subspecies, and 2 varieties giving a total of 28 *taxa*.