TECOMASUCHE

Cochlospermum Vitifolium

FLAAR Reports

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Cochlosperum vitifolium

"The Natural Beauty of the Flora & Fauna of Honduras, Central America is as interesting to experience as are the prehispanic Maya ruins & art"

Photo: Sofia Monzón

Tecomasuche, *Coclospermum vitifolium* surrounding Copan Sculpture Museum

During mid-April we spent several days photographing all notable flowering trees around Copan Ruinas, Honduras which are of significance for studies of Maya ethnobotany. Over the last five years we have built up a reference photo archive of perhaps 35,000 high-res images of utilitarian and sacred plants of Guatemala (and some of El Salvador). Since the Maya culture extended into Honduras, we felt it would be useful to expand our photography to Honduras.

We will donate copies of our photography to IHAH. And we give away our publications at no cost to students, scholars, and interested lay people.

There was a Tecomasuche tree, *Cochlospermum vitifolium* in front of the entrance to the Copan Sculpture Museum still giving some flowers, so we photographed this with our telephoto and tele-macro lenses with a 21 megapixel Canon camera.

Tecomasuche, *Cochlospermum vitifolium*: photo sessions in past year

During the last two years we have noticed Tecomasuche, *Cochlospermum vitifolium* flowering throughout Guatemala. It is a relatively common tree in several d epartamentos of Guatemala. We show samples of those photographs on our web site www.maya-ethnobotany.org.

Photo: Sofia Monzón

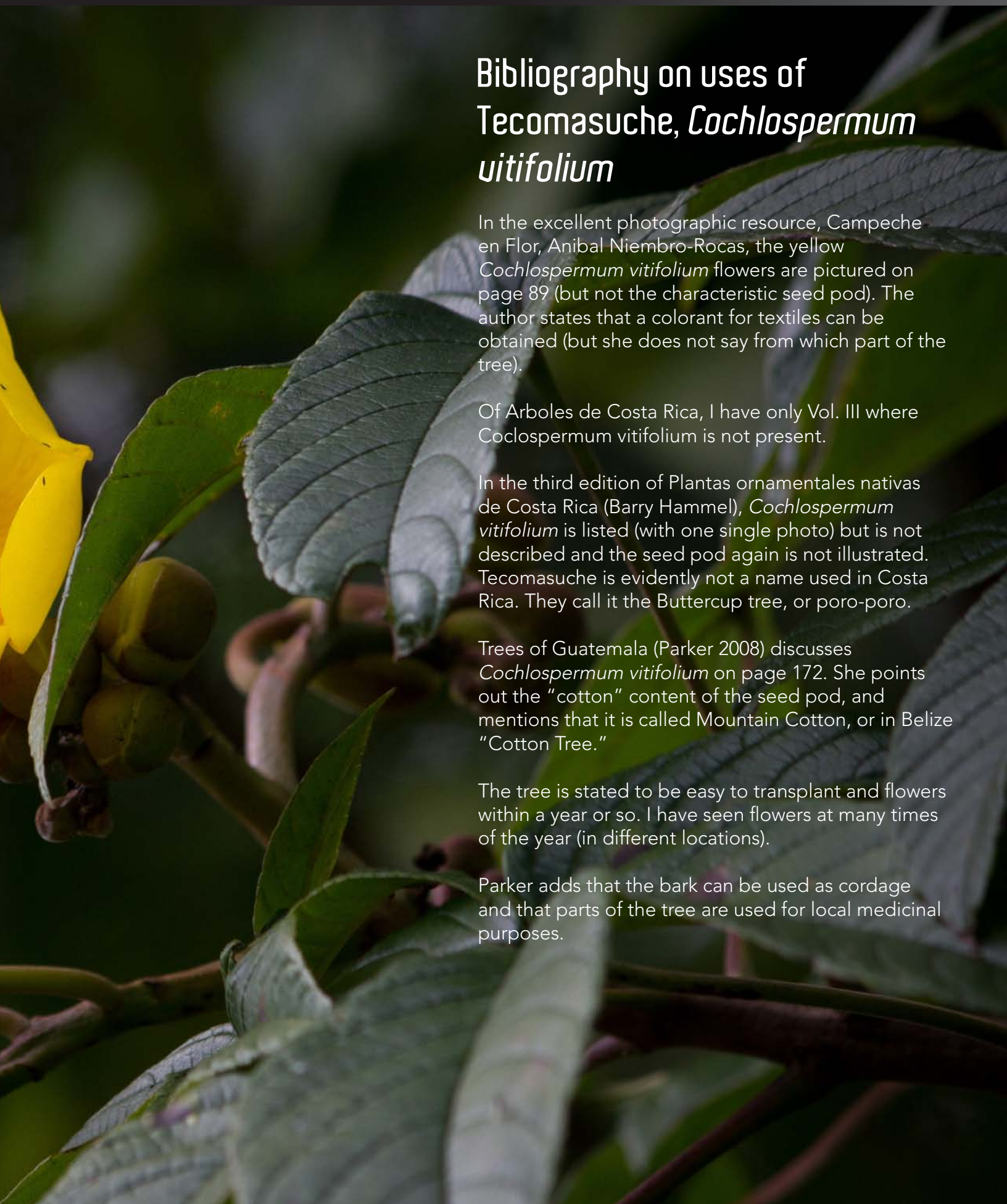
Photo equipment utilized at Copan to photograph the Tecomasuche flowers and fruits

There were only a few flowers and seed pods remaining. In another week or so the green seed pods will mature and the cotton-like fiber will become visible as the pod opens.

To photograph the Tecomasuche, *Cochlospermum vitifolium* at Copan we used a tall Gitzo tripod, a Canon flash, and a tele-photo flash adapter. This adapter throws the flash in a narrow beam so it can reach the flowers and fruits high up in the tree. Most normal flash, by itself, can adequately illuminate things far away.

Since it was very windy this week, even with a high ISO it was tough to freeze the flowers and fruits perfectly, but we did the best we could with a reasonable speed.

Photo: Sofia Monzón



Bibliography on uses of Tecomasuche, *Cochlospermum vitifolium*

In the excellent photographic resource, Campeche en Flor, Anibal Niembro-Rocas, the yellow *Cochlospermum vitifolium* flowers are pictured on page 89 (but not the characteristic seed pod). The author states that a colorant for textiles can be obtained (but she does not say from which part of the tree).

Of Arboles de Costa Rica, I have only Vol. III where Coclospermum vitifolium is not present.

In the third edition of Plantas ornamentales nativas de Costa Rica (Barry Hammel), *Cochlospermum vitifolium* is listed (with one single photo) but is not described and the seed pod again is not illustrated. Tecomasuche is evidently not a name used in Costa Rica. They call it the Buttercup tree, or poro-poro.

Trees of Guatemala (Parker 2008) discusses *Cochlospermum vitifolium* on page 172. She points out the "cotton" content of the seed pod, and mentions that it is called Mountain Cotton, or in Belize "Cotton Tree."

The tree is stated to be easy to transplant and flowers within a year or so. I have seen flowers at many times of the year (in different locations).

Parker adds that the bark can be used as cordage and that parts of the tree are used for local medicinal purposes.

Additional Bibliography

One opus is particularly pertinent.

Paul R. House, Instituto Regional de Biodiversidad, IRBio, prepared a 26 page report in 2007 on Ethnobotanica Maya, Parque Arqueologico Ruinas de Copan (available on-line, as PDF).

He makes complete lists of every kind of tree or food crop for the area. If you are interested in the complete ethnobotany of the Copan area, his lists are very important.

How FLAAR can contribute is to provide high-resolution photographs of the different plants. Obviously only a few flowers are blooming each month, and each year the flowering season varies depending on the weather that year. So it takes about three years of field trips to find and photograph most species in any one area.

The field trip of April was intended to show the photographic capability of the FLAAR team to aid botanical studies in Honduras. If funds become available, we would enjoy contributing photographs of all the other pertinent species.

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