

## Oral presentation

### Comparative ethnobotanical knowledge of an Amerindian and Maroon community in Suriname, South America

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**Introduction.** Tropical forest "Maroon" cultures were established in Suriname by escaped African slave groups during the 1600s and 1700s. Since that time, Amerindian and Maroon cultures have co-existed in Suriname, living in distinct regions, yet within ecologically-similar forestlands. Such conditions are amenable to questions exploring the role of culture and 'geographical seniority' in ethnobotany. This paper compares two cultures, Saramacca Maroons and Trio Amerindians, for specialist knowledge on plant uses within vegetation zones and community consensus on favored plant resources.

**Objectives.** The objectives of this paper are to (1) address the hypothesis that a cultural group with significant geographical seniority over a second cultural group possesses a greater base of ethnobotanical knowledge (folk species cited names and uses); (2) explore patterns of ethnobotanical similarity and difference between the two cultures; and (3) provide information for land and resource use planning that takes local cultural models of land and resource use into account.

**Methods.** Research was conducted at two sites: 1) the Saramaccan (Maroon) community of Stonhuku in central Suriname and 2) the Trio (Carib-speaking) Amerindian community of Kwamalasamutu in far-southern Suriname. Three to four local participants were non-randomly selected at each site (purposive interviews) based upon their reputation as plant knowledge specialists. Ethnobotanical knowledge (names/uses) was recorded for vouchered specimens within 1.0 hectare plots and subplots ( $\geq 5$  cm dbh). Vegetation types included upland non-flooded mixed forest, swamp forest, and older fallow forest. Free-listing interviews on favored plant resources within use categories were made with randomly and opportunistically selected participants (> 50 individuals at each village site).

**Results.** For specialist knowledge within vegetation zones, the % cited uses within the categories of 'food', 'medicine', and 'construction', revealed the maintenance of idiosyncratic cultural tendencies regardless of zone. Maroon use citations were dominated by 'construction' and 'medicine' uses (20-30%), with less than 8% of citations for food. Trio Amerindian specialists cited 'medicine' to an inordinate degree (30-45%), with food and construction receiving no more than 13% of citations. Considering medicinal use citations alone, the Trios most often mentioned liana bark and wood while the Saramaccans most often employed leaves. Preliminary results show that Amerindian specialists knew more names and uses for plants within hectare plots than Saramacca specialists. For example, Amerindian specialists cited names for close to 100% of liana and tree stems within hectare plots while Saramaccan specialists did not cite names for 41% of liana stems, 27% of medium-sized tree stems (15-25 m tall), and 19% of understory tree stems. A similar pattern was seen for plant uses. In free-listing exercises with all use citations pooled (top 10 list), both cultures cited palm species (4-5 palms) and fiber/cordage species (2 species). However, the Trio top ten list included 2 medicinal lianas and a fruit tree, while the Saramaccans cited 3 timber trees.

**Conclusion.** This study reveals the idiosyncratic nature of ethnobotanical forest knowledge because culture played a more important role in determining resource use patterns than did floristic variation by vegetation zone. A positive correlation between the 'geographical seniority' of the Trios and more robust ethnobotanical knowledge was shown. However, in many cases, Saramaccan Maroon ethnobotany was found to be unique rather than an incomplete version of Trio Amerindian ethnobotany. I found that the Saramaccans have conserved cultural traditions to a greater degree than the Trios and this has implications for conservation. Cultural norms and taboos that protect forest zones, tree species, and plant resources were in evidence among the Saramacca and almost absent among the Trio. Understanding unique ethnobotanical models of land and resource use provides case studies for conservation and development that is fine-tuned to local people's interests and needs.

Keywords: Saramacca, Trio, land use

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