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ARTÍCULOS

***Parmotrema* species in a cloud forest region turned into an urban zone in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico**

Especies de *Parmotrema* en un bosque mesófilo de montaña convertido en zona urbana en Xalapa, Veracruz, México

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SUMMARY

The cloud forest of Mexico has the highest biodiversity among the country's diverse forest types; however, 90 % of the cloud forest ecosystem in the region of Xalapa has been destroyed and what remains is at risk. This region is home to an enormous diversity of lichen species. In a lichen survey carried out in this remnant of cloud forest in Xalapa, which has been turned into an urban area, we identified only eight species of *Parmotrema*, all of which showed vegetative propagules. Regardless of the role of the genus in the ecosystems, these lichens may be disappearing as a result of the transformation and destruction of the cloud forest ecosystem in Mexico.

Key words: *Parmotrema*, cloud forest, Xalapa Region, Mexico.

RESUMEN

El bosque mesófilo de montaña es de los ecosistemas más diversos que hay en el México; sin embargo, en la región de Xalapa el 90 % ha sido destruido y el resto está en riesgo. La región alberga gran diversidad de líquenes. En este sitio de estudio, que fue un remanente de bosque mesófilo de montaña transformado a zona urbana, se identificaron solo ocho especies pertenecientes al género *Parmotrema*, todas ellas presentaron propágulos vegetativos. No obstante la importancia del género en los ecosistemas, estos líquenes están en riesgo de desaparecer como resultado de la transformación y destrucción del ecosistema en México.

Palabras clave: *Parmotrema*, bosque mesófilo, región de Xalapa, México.

INTRODUCTION

Corticolous lichens such as the genus *Parmotrema* A. Massal face extinction due to their inability to disperse, settle and colonize in declining forests. Corticolous lichens depend directly on the quality of bark substratum and high microhabitat heterogeneity of tree trunks for their settlement and survival (Hauck *et al.* 2001). Seaward (2008) suggests that a potential factor influencing epiphytic lichen individuals and populations may be the quality and longevity of the substratum trees. Tree mortality is a common cause of local extinctions of epiphyte meta-populations (Snäll *et al.* 2003). A survival strategy for some foliose lichens is to produce asexual propagules to disperse the fungal and photobiont cells together. The most common categories of these asexual propagules are soredia, isidia and thallus fragments (Armstrong 1991), which are scattered by wind, water and animals. The-

se vegetative strategies provide a superior survival rate for propagules, since lichens can more rapidly invade new habitats, and, under favorable conditions, grow into new thalli (Bowler and Rundel 1975). Veracruz is one of the Mexican states with the highest richness of known lichens (700), and cloud forests shelter *ca.* 250 species (Herrera-Campos *et al.* 2014). The main focus of this study is to find out how many species of *Parmotrema* have been able to survive, since most of the cloud forest ecosystem was first turned into coffee plantations and then eventually into urban areas.

METHODS

Study site. The study was carried out in an urban area of the Zoncuantla region, along Camino Antiguo (old road) Xalapa-Coatepec, about 6 km south of Xalapa in the State of Veracruz. The area is approximately 1,000 m². The site

is located at 19°29'56" N and 96°56'40" W, at an altitude of 1,300 m (figure 1). The climate is temperate with a mean annual temperature of 19.2 °C. The mean annual precipitation is 1,926 mm, with rains in summer and autumn. The original vegetation in the study geographical area was that of cloud forests (figure 2A), which gradually decreased during last century until 1960, due to the expansion of coffee plantations; later on, the transformation of the ecosystem was caused by demographic fast-growth. Currently, 90 % of this forest has been destroyed and what remains is at risk of disappearing (Williams-Linera *et al.* 2002).

Lichen sampling and taxonomic identification. Lichens were surveyed by the second author of this article over a 14 year period in an urban area, taken primarily from fallen trees and branches (figure 3A) of remaining trees of *Platanus mexicana* Moric, *Quercus xalapensis* Bonpl., *Q. laurina* Bonpl., *Inga jinicuil* Schltdl. and *Ulmus mexicana* Planch. Collected specimens were identified by the first author reviewing the macroscopic and microscopic characters with a compound microscope Axiostar Plus Zeiss and a stereoscopic microscope Zeiss Stemi model DV4, making the color test and following the corresponding key. Finally, Dr. Robert Egan (Omaha, Nebraska) confirmed the identifications. Voucher specimens are deposited at the Colección de Hongos (XAL) of Instituto de Ecología A.C.

RESULTS

We found thirteen genera belonging to three families: Candelariaceae, Physciaceae and Parmeliaceae. In this stu-

dy, we only focused on *Parmotrema* lichens. One hundred and twenty specimens were collected, 34 of them were too small or lacked reproductive structures to allow identification to species level. Lichen richness and coverage decline as urbanization increases. Evidence of it is that, at this particular site, we only identified eight species of *Parmotrema*; and all of them showed vegetative propagules (table 1, figures 1, 2).

Table 1. Species identified in a remnant of cloud forest in Zoncuanla, Xalapa, Veracruz.

Especies identificadas en un remanente de bosque mesófilo de montaña en Zoncuanla, Xalapa, Veracruz.

Species	Reproductive structures
<i>Parmotrema austrosinense</i> (Zahlbr.) Hale	Soredia
<i>Parmotrema hababianum</i> (Gyelnik) Hale	Soredia
<i>Parmotrema praesorediosum</i> (Nyl.) Hale	Soredia
<i>Parmotrema reticulatum</i> (Taylor) M. Choisy	Soredia
<i>Parmotrema sancti-angelii</i> (Lynge) Hale	Soredia
<i>Parmotrema subsidiosum</i> (Müll. Arg.) Hale	Isidia
<i>Parmotrema subtinctorium</i> (Zahlbr.) Hale	Isidia
<i>Parmotrema tinctorum</i> (Delise ex Nyl.) Hale	Isidia

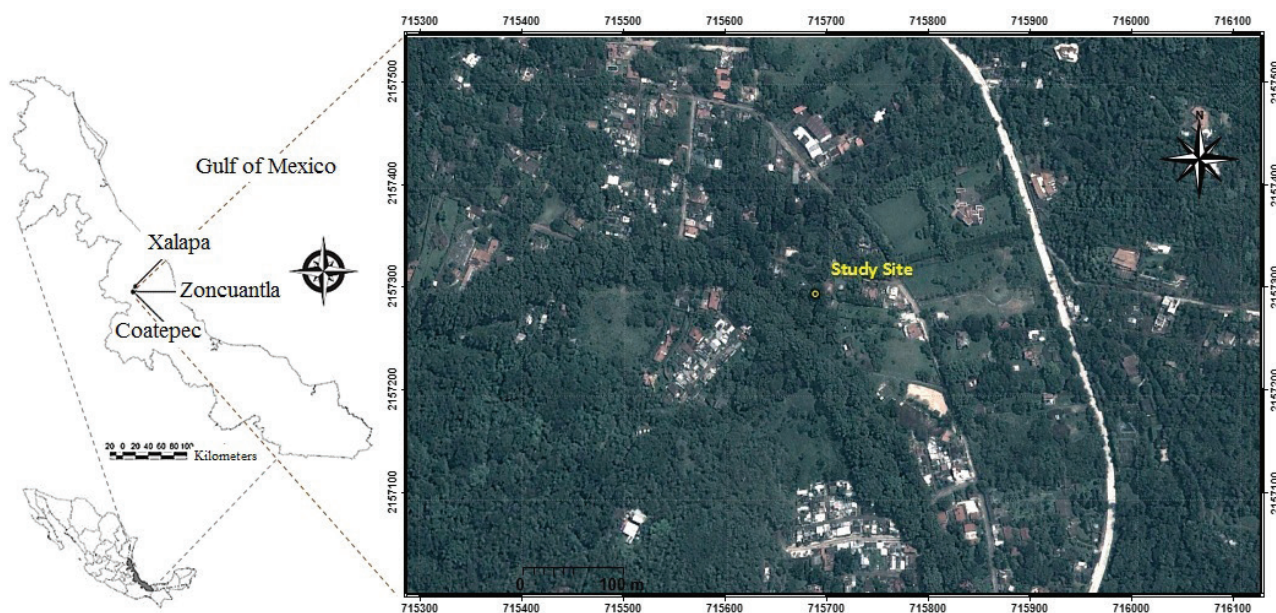


Figure 1. Geographic situation of the Zoncuanla region, located between Xalapa and Coatepec, State of Veracruz, Mexico (developed by C Sandoval and J Ramírez).

Ubicación geográfica de la región de Zoncuanla, entre Xalapa y Coatepec, en el estado de Veracruz, México (elaborada por C Sandoval y J Ramírez).

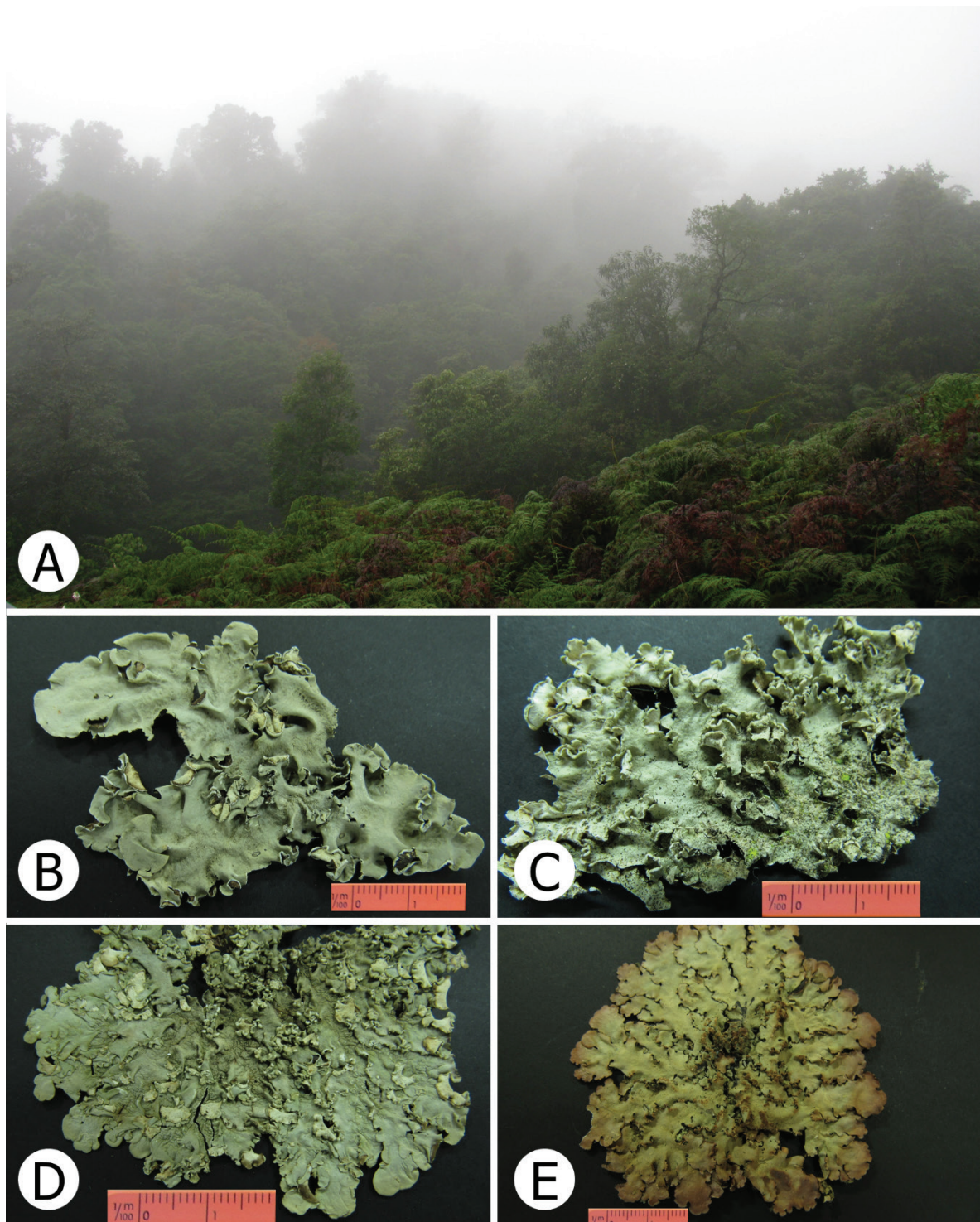


Figure 2. A) Remnant of a Cloud forest in La Cortadura, Coatepec, Veracruz, Mexico. B) *Parmotrema austrosinense*. C) *Parmotrema hababianum*. D) *Parmotrema praesorediosum*. E) *Parmotrema reticulatum*. (Herbarium specimens) Photos by RE Pérez-Pérez.

A) Remanente de un bosque mesófilo de montaña en La Cortadura, Coatepec, Veracruz, México. B) *Parmotrema austrosinense*, C) *Parmotrema hababianum*, D) *Parmotrema praesorediosum*, E) *Parmotrema reticulatum*. (Material de herbario). Fotografías de RE Pérez-Pérez.

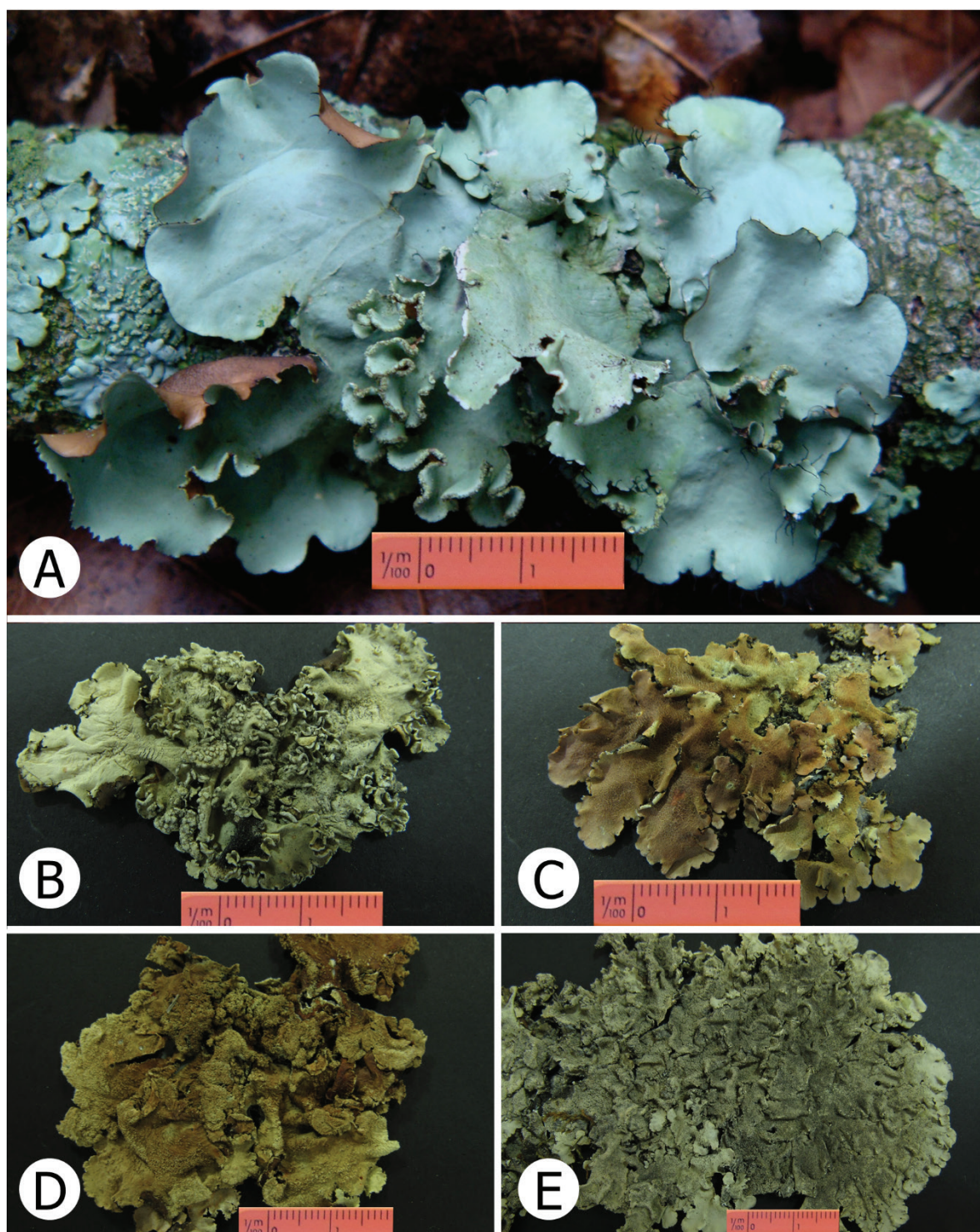


Figure 3. A) Fallen branch with species of *Parmotrema*. B) *Parmotrema sancti-angelii*. C) *Parmotrema subsidiosum*. D) *Parmotrema subtincturum*. E) *Parmotrema tinctorum*. (Herbarium specimens) Photo A by F Ramírez Guillen, photos B-E by RE Pérez-Pérez.

A) Rama caída con especies de *Parmotrema*. B) *Parmotrema sancti-angelii*. C) *Parmotrema subsidiosum*. D) *Parmotrema subtincturum*. E) *Parmotrema tinctorum*. (Material de herbario). Fotografías: F. Ramírez Guillen (A), RE Pérez-Pérez (B-E).

DISCUSSION

There are more than 300 species of *Parmotrema* worldwide (Hinds and Hinds 2007), with 224 species widely distributed in tropical regions around the world (Hale and DePriest 1999) and nearly 100 are from Mexico (Nash III and Elix 2002); some of them were considered endemic to Mexico by Hale (1965). One of these, *Parmotrema mirandum* (Hale) was reported for the first time in the Mexican states of Guerrero and Morelos. It is one of the few records including Hypoconstictic acid as a major secondary metabolite and points out this substance as a major diagnostic secondary metabolite for *Parmotrema* spp. (Pérez-Pérez *et al.* 2011a).

Regarding the propagules, Bowler and Rundel (1975) suggest that propagation through vegetative diaspores appears to allow higher survival rates. However, Johansson (2008) showed that lichen populations might need a long time to recover, though that species richness does not necessarily increase over time. In fact, corticolous lichens are slow-growing and slow to colonize new ecosystems due to their sensitivity to environmental changes (Wolseley and Aguirre-Hudson 1997). Lichen populations are likely to become extinct when their phorophyte substrates are limited to a very low diversity (Sheidegger *et al.* 1995).

Tropical montane cloud forests support the most diverse fauna and flora per square meter in Mexico in spite of the creation of coffee plantations, land pasture areas and urbanization sites (Williams-Linera 1993). Being epiphytes the most diverse biological group in the ecosystem (Williams-Linera 2012), just like the lichens. Lichens play a very important role in the nutrients cycle (Nash 2008). For instance, among animals including mice and bats, lichens are used as food (Kumor *et al.* 2009), and some birds use *Parmotrema* spp. lichens as nesting material (Mauricio *et al.* 2013, Mercado-Díaz *et al.* 2015).

In studies conducted in the coniferous forests of Mexico, the Parmeliaceae family is the most representative, and the genus *Parmotrema* is one of the most diverse and conspicuous (Pérez-Pérez *et al.* 2008, 2011b, Herrera-Campos *et al.* 2014), probably due to its long distance dispersal capability by means of wind and/or birds (Elix and Gremmen 2002). Unfortunately, lichen diversity has declined along with the transformation of ecosystems. Even if some valuable trees survive over the course of these developments, their lichen biota is likely to become depleted over time (Lättman *et al.* 2014) which will decrease lichen populations, size and diversity (Öckinger and Nilsson 2010).

In the state of Veracruz studies have focused on foliicolous lichens and some macrolichens (Brizuela and Guzmán 1971, Herrera-Campos and Lücking 2002, Herrera-Campos *et al.* 2004). Though in the Xalapa region lichen studies are scarce (Palacios *et al.* 1999). There are two studies in a remnant of cloud forest at La Cortadura, Coatepec, Veracruz; one of them describes three new corticolous lichen species (Córdova-Chávez *et al.* 2014). On the

other hand, Pérez-Pérez *et al.* (2015) reported 108 lichens species, 36 belonging to the Parmeliaceae family and 14 to the genus *Parmotrema*. Using *Parmotrema* spp. here as a model group, we suggest that these foliose lichens in the Xalapa region are declining due to environmental changes in the cloud forest ecosystem caused by the loss of suitable corticolous substrates; therefore, it is necessary to immediately implement conservation programs to try and preserve what remains of this ecosystem, if possible (Guzmán 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

The lichen flora of the cloud forest regions of Mexico has extremely high lichen species richness; nevertheless, it is endangered due to human activities, such as the creation of coffee plantations, land pasture areas and urbanization sites. Despite the ability of some lichen taxa to disperse and survive in cloud forest remnants using asexual vegetative propagules, we need to complete a detailed inventory of the lichen biodiversity of Mexican cloud forests before these forests are lost forever; especially if we take into account the importance of the *Parmotrema* genus for the ecosystem.

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