

# Phylogenetic classification of the world's tropical forests

J. W. Ferry Slik<sup>a,1</sup>, Janet Franklin<sup>b,1</sup>, Víctor Arroyo-Rodríguez<sup>c</sup>, Richard Field<sup>d</sup>, Salomon Aguilar<sup>e</sup>, Nikolay Aguirre<sup>f</sup>, Jorge Ahumada<sup>g</sup>, Shin-Ichiro Aiba<sup>h</sup>, Luciana F. Alves<sup>i</sup>, Anitha K<sup>j</sup>, Andres Avella<sup>k</sup>, Francisco Mora<sup>c</sup>, Gerardo A. Aymard C. <sup>l,m</sup>, Selene Báez<sup>n</sup>, Patricia Balvanera<sup>c</sup>, Meredith L. Bastian<sup>o</sup>, Jean-François Bastin<sup>p</sup>, Peter J. Bellingham<sup>q</sup>, Eduardo van den Berg<sup>r</sup>, Polyanna da Conceição Bispo<sup>s</sup>, Pascal Boeckx<sup>t</sup>, Katrin Boehning-Gaese<sup>u,v</sup>, Frans Bongers<sup>w</sup>, Brad Boyle<sup>x</sup>, Fabian Brambach<sup>y</sup>, Francis Q. Brearley<sup>z</sup>, Sandra Brown<sup>aa,2</sup>, Shauna-Lee Chai<sup>bb</sup>, Robin L. Chazdon<sup>cc</sup>, Shengbin Chen<sup>dd</sup>, Phourin Chhang<sup>ee</sup>, George Chuyong<sup>ff</sup>, Corneille Ewango<sup>gg</sup>, Indiana M. Coronado<sup>hh</sup>, Jurgi Cristóbal-Azkarate<sup>ii</sup>, Heike Culmsee<sup>jj</sup>, Kipiro Damas<sup>kk</sup>, H. S. Dattaraja<sup>ll</sup>, Priya Davidar<sup>mm</sup>, Saara J. DeWalt<sup>nn</sup>, Hazimah Din<sup>a</sup>, Donald R. Drake<sup>oo</sup>, Alvaro Duque<sup>pp</sup>, Giselda Durigan<sup>qq</sup>, Karl Eichhorn<sup>rr</sup>, Eduardo Schmidt Eler<sup>ss</sup>, Tsutomu Enoki<sup>tt</sup>, Andreas Ensslin<sup>uu</sup>, Adandé Belarmain Fandohan<sup>vv</sup>, Nina Farwig<sup>wv</sup>, Kenneth J. Feeley<sup>xx</sup>, Markus Fischer<sup>uu</sup>, Olle Forshed<sup>yy</sup>, Queila Souza Garcia<sup>zz</sup>, Satish Chandra Garkoti<sup>aaa</sup>, Thomas W. Gillespie<sup>bbb</sup>, Jean-Francois Gillet<sup>ccc</sup>, Christelle Gonmadje<sup>ddd,eee</sup>, Iñigo Granzow-de la Cerda<sup>fff</sup>, Daniel M. Griffith<sup>999</sup>, James Grogan<sup>hhh</sup>, Khalid Rehman Hakeem<sup>iii</sup>, David J. Harris<sup>iii</sup>, Rhett D. Harrison<sup>kkk</sup>, Andy Hector<sup>III</sup>, Andreas Hemp<sup>mmm</sup>, Jürgen Homeier<sup>nnn</sup>, M. Shah Hussain<sup>ooo</sup>, Guillermo Ibarra-Manríquez<sup>c</sup>, I. Faridah Hanum<sup>ppp</sup>, Nobuo Imai<sup>qqq</sup>, Patrick A. Jansen<sup>e,w</sup>, Carlos Alfredo Jolyrrr, Shijo Joseph<sup>j,sss</sup>, Kuswata Kartawinata<sup>ttt,uuu</sup>, Elizabeth Kearsley<sup>vvv</sup>, Daniel L. Kelly<sup>www</sup>, Michael Kessler<sup>xxx</sup>, Timothy J. Killeen<sup>yyy</sup>, Robert M. Kooyman<sup>zzz,aaaa</sup>, Yves Laumonier<sup>i</sup>, Susan G. Laurance<sup>bbbb</sup>, William F. Laurance<sup>bbbb</sup>, Michael J. Lawes<sup>cccc</sup>, Susan G. Letcher<sup>dddd</sup>, Jeremy Lindsell<sup>eeee</sup>, Jon Lovett<sup>ffff,gggg</sup>, Jose Lozada<sup>hhhh</sup>, Xinghui Lu<sup>iiii</sup>, Anne Mette Lykke<sup>jjjj</sup>, Khairil Bin Mahmud<sup>kkkk</sup>, Ni Putu Diana Mahayani<sup>llll</sup>, Asyraf Mansor<sup>mmmm,nnn</sup> Andrew R. Marshall<sup>oooo,pppp,qqqq</sup>, Emanuel H. Martin<sup>rrrr</sup>, Darley Calderado Leal Matos<sup>ssss</sup>, Jorge A. Meave<sup>tttt</sup>, Felipe P. L. Melo<sup>uuuu</sup>, Zhofre Huberto Aguirre Mendoza<sup>vvvv</sup>, Faizah Metali<sup>a</sup>, Vincent P. Medjibe<sup>wwww</sup>, Jean Paul Metzger<sup>xxxx</sup>, Thiago Metzker<sup>zz,yyyy</sup>, D. Mohandass<sup>mm,zzzz</sup>, Miguel A. Munguía-Rosas<sup>aaaaa</sup>, Rodrigo Muñoz<sup>tttt</sup>, Eddy Nurtjahy<sup>bbbbb</sup>, Eddie Lenza de Oliveira<sup>ccccc</sup>, Onrizal<sup>ddddd</sup>, Pia Parolin<sup>eeeee,fffff</sup>, Marc Parren<sup>ggggg</sup>, N. Parthasarathy<sup>mm</sup>, Ekananda Paudel<sup>hhhhh</sup>, Rolando Perez<sup>e</sup>, Eduardo A. Pérez-García<sup>tttt</sup>, Ulf Pommer<sup>u</sup>, Lourens Poorter<sup>w</sup>, Lan Qie<sup>fffff</sup>, Maria Teresa F. Piedadess, José Roberto Rodrigues Pintoiiii, Axel Dalberg Poulsenii, John R. Poulseniii, Jennifer S. Powers<sup>kkkk</sup>, Rama Chandra Prasad<sup>lill</sup>, Jean-Philippe Puyravaud<sup>mmmmm</sup>, Orlando Rangel<sup>k</sup>, Jan Reitsma<sup>nnnnn</sup>, Diogo S. B. Rocha<sup>ooooo</sup>, Samir Rolim<sup>ppppp</sup>, Francesco Rovero<sup>qqqqq</sup>, Andes Rozak<sup>rrrr</sup>, Kalle Ruokolainen<sup>sssss</sup>, Ervan Rutishauser<sup>e</sup>, Gemma Rutten<sup>uu</sup>, Mohd. Nizam Mohd. Said<sup>ttttt</sup>, Felipe Z. Saiter<sup>uuuuu</sup>, Philippe Saner<sup>vvvvv</sup> Braulio Santos<sup>wwwww</sup>, João Roberto dos Santos<sup>xxxxx</sup>, Swapan Kumar Sarker<sup>yyyyy</sup>, Christine B. Schmitt<sup>zzzzz,aaaaaa</sup>, Jochen Schoengart<sup>ss</sup>, Mark Schulze<sup>bbbbbb</sup>, Douglas Sheil<sup>cccccc</sup>, Plinio Sist<sup>dddddd</sup>, Alexandre F. Souza<sup>eeeeee</sup>, Wilson Roberto Spironello<sup>ss</sup>, Tereza Sposito<sup>zz,yyyy</sup>, Robert Steinmetz<sup>ffffff</sup>, Tariq Stevart<sup>gggggg</sup>, Marcio Seiji Suganuma<sup>hhhhhh</sup>, Rahayu Sukri<sup>a</sup>, Aisha Sultana<sup>iiiii</sup>, Raman Sukumar<sup>II</sup>, Terry Sunderland<sup>j</sup>, Supriyadi<sup>IIII</sup>, H. S. Suresh<sup>II</sup>, Eizi Suzuki<sup>h</sup>, Marcelo Tabarelli<sup>jijijj</sup>, Jianwei Tang<sup>kkkkkk</sup>, Ed V. J. Tanner<sup>IIIIII</sup>, Natalia Targhetta<sup>ss</sup>, Ida Theilade<sup>mmmmmm</sup>, Duncan Thomas<sup>nnnnnn</sup>, Jonathan Timberlake<sup>gggg</sup>, Márcio de Morisson Valeriano<sup>xxxxx</sup>, Johan van Valkenburg<sup>oooooo</sup>, Tran Van Do<sup>pppppp</sup>, Hoang Van Sam<sup>qqqqqq</sup>, John H. Vandermeer<sup>rrrrr</sup>, Hans Verbeeck<sup>vvv</sup>, Ole Reidar Vetaas<sup>ssssss</sup>, Victor Adekunlettttt, Simone A. Vieirarr, Campbell O. Webbuuuuuu, Edward L. Webbvvvvv, Timothy Whitfeldwwwww, C. Yves Adou Yao<sup>cccccc</sup>, Sandra L. Yap<sup>ddddddd</sup>, Rakan A. Zahawi<sup>eeeeeee</sup>, Rahmad Zakaria<sup>mmmm</sup>, and Runguo Zang<sup>iiii</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>To whom correspondence may be addressed. Email: ferryslik@hotmail.com or janet.franklin@ucr.edu.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Deceased February 13, 2017.

Knowledge about the biogeographic affinities of the world's tropical forests helps to better understand regional differences in forest structure, diversity, composition, and dynamics. Such understanding will enable anticipation of region-specific responses to global environmental change. Modern phylogenies, in combination with broad coverage of species inventory data, now allow for global biogeographic analyses that take species evolutionary distance into account. Here we present a classification of the world's tropical forests based on their phylogenetic similarity. We identify five principal floristic regions and their floristic relationships: (i) Indo-Pacific, (ii) Subtropical, (iii) African, (iv) American, and (v) Dry forests. Our results do not support the traditional neo- versus paleotropical forest division but instead separate the combined American and African forests from their Indo-Pacific counterparts. We also find indications for the existence of a global dry forest region, with representatives in America, Africa, Madagascar, and India. Additionally, a northern-hemisphere Subtropical forest region was identified with representatives in Asia and America, providing support for a link between Asian and American northernhemisphere forests.

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he biogeographic origin of species, in combination with dispersal limitation and environmental filtering, are the principal determinants of spatial variation in the species composition of tropical forests (1, 2). Despite evidence of long-distance dispersal (1, 3-5), tropical forests maintain conspicuous regional differences in species composition. For example, only ~4% of tropical tree species are shared among Africa, America, and Asia (6). The lack of species overlap among continents makes global inference of relationships among tropical forests problematic, because such classifications depend on comparison of the amount of shared species. Therefore, pan-tropical biogeographic analyses have been based on comparison of compositional patterns at higher taxonomic levels, namely genus or family (6–8). However, such analyses treat taxa as independent units, while in reality taxa vary in their degree of phylogenetic relatedness and, as a consequence, their morphological and ecological similarity (1, 2). Taking phylogenetic relatedness into consideration enhances our ability to delimit phytogeographical boundaries that characterize functional and biogeographic affinities among forest regions (1, 2, 9, 10). Here we include phylogenetic relationships in a floristic analysis to provide such insight.

We compiled a standardized dataset of old-growth tropical forest inventories of angiosperm trees (trunk diameter ≥10 cm) for 406 1° latitude/longitude grid cells (hereafter referred to as "locations") originally dominated by natural forests across the (sub)tropics (Table S1). These locations represented all major tropical forest regions and had broad environmental amplitude, including low to high elevations and dry to wet forests (Fig. 1 and Fig. S1). To determine the phylogenetic distance between locations, we constructed a dated phylogenetic tree that was resolved to genus level and contained all taxa used for our classification analyses (Dataset S1). Location pairwise phylogenetic distance matrices were constructed using 20 randomly drawn tree taxa per location. We used 20 taxa, as this maximized the number of locations that could be included in the classification analyses while still providing a reliable classification result. In total, we generated 20 phylogenetic distance matrices, each with a different set of 20 randomly drawn taxa per location, which served as input for 20 cluster analyses (Fig. S2). The final classification of each location depended on the frequency with which it was classified in a particular cluster across all 20 cluster analyses (Fig. S3). Relationships between the clusters were represented by a majority rule consensus tree (Fig. 1).

# Significance

Identifying and explaining regional differences in tropical forest dynamics, structure, diversity, and composition are critical for anticipating region-specific responses to global environmental change. Floristic classifications are of fundamental importance for these efforts. Here we provide a global tropical forest classification that is explicitly based on community evolutionary similarity, resulting in identification of five major tropical forest regions and their relationships: (i) Indo-Pacific, (ii) Subtropical, (iii) African, (iv) American, and (v) Dry forests. African and American forests are grouped, reflecting their former western Gondwanan connection, while Indo-Pacific forests range from eastern Africa and Madagascar to Australia and the Pacific. The connection between northernhemisphere Asian and American forests is confirmed, while Dry forests are identified as a single tropical biome.

### **Results and Discussion**

Mean pairwise phylogenetic distance analysis, which emphasizes ancient lineages in phylogenetic community comparisons, detected almost no spatial patterns in community phylogenetic similarity across the tropics, indicating that all tropical forest locations consist of more or less the same set of ancient plant lineages. This is in accordance with recent findings that the whole present-day tropics are dominated by similar high levels of Late Cretaceous aged phylogenetic lineages (11). Only when we used mean nearest taxon distance, which emphasizes recent lineages in phylogenetic community comparisons, did we detect clear spatial patterns across the tropics. Therefore, current-day biogeographic patterns in the tropics seem to mainly reflect Cenozoic speciation events when Gondwanan breakup was already well on its way.

Using the mean nearest taxon distance, our phylogenetic cluster analyses showed that the world's tropical forests are divided into two major floristic regions: a combined American-African versus Indo-Pacific region (Fig. 1). This division contradicts previous hypotheses about major global realms, which either recognized neo- versus paleotropical regions or several separate continental regions (4, 12–14). However, Gentry (7) already noted the high generic-level similarity of tropical American and African forests. He attributed this to Cretaceous and Cenozoic plate tectonic history (4, 15). Subsequent studies have shown that despite the severing of direct land connections between the African and South American plates ca. 96 Mya, long-distance dispersal continued throughout the Late Cretaceous and Early Tertiary across the widening Atlantic Ocean (4, 5). The combined effect of shared origin with trans-Atlantic migration may explain the detected connection between South American and African forests.

Within the American-African cluster, the first split separated the African from the American regions (Fig. 1), suggestive of the west Gondwanan breakup associated with the formation of the Atlantic Ocean and, over time, the increasing difficulty for plants to disperse across the Atlantic (1, 15). Interestingly, the African region showed the highest consistency in clustering of all five identified floristic regions. On average, locations belonging to the African region were assigned to this cluster in 91.4% of cases, versus consistency values of 79.5, 63.7, 79.5, and 70.3% for the Indo-Pacific, Subtropical, American, and Dry forest regions, respectively. This clustering consistency indicates high floristic similarity across tropical Africa, which is in accord with the relatively low beta diversity observed for these forests (6). Postulated repeated cycles of contraction and expansion of the tropical African forests from a few small forest refugia in combination

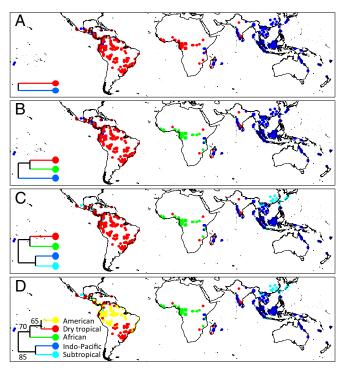


Fig. 1. Classification maps of the world's tropical forests, showing two (A), three (B), four (C), and five (D) clusters. Cluster result represents a majority rule consensus tree, with the percentage of times that each grouping was observed in the 20 separate cluster analyses shown in D. Only locations that could be classified with certainty (P < 0.05) are shown (n = 392).

with large-scale species shifts during the Pleistocene glaciations may explain the relatively high compositional homogeneity of the forests within the African region (16, 17).

The tropical American forests were further divided into moist and dry forests (Fig. 1 and Fig. S1), indicating that this division is primarily environmental (18). The American floristic region comprises humid forests, including the lowland forests of Central America, the Amazon basin, the Guianas, and the northern half of the Atlantic forest. The Dry forest region encompasses the Caatinga and Cerrado regions as well as other dry forests throughout the Americas but interestingly, and contrary to the nonphylogenetic pan-tropical analysis by Dexter et al. (8), also includes dry forests of Africa, Madagascar, and India. Further research is needed to confirm whether this indicates the existence of a global dry forest region with a shared biogeographic origin, or whether selection for drought and fire resistance has favored the dominance of similar plant lineages in tropical dry forests around the world (8, 18, 19).

The Indo-Pacific floristic region occupies the humid areas of eastern Africa, Madagascar, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands (Fig. 1). With the exception of SE Asia, which is of Laurasian origin, this floristic region combines all areas that once comprised eastern Gondwana (4, 15). Given the diverse geologic history of Asia and the Indo-Pacific (20), it is surprising to find a similar forest type covering most of the region. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence of significant plant migration within this region that likely had a homogenizing effect, notably the biotic exchange between India and Southeast Asia starting from ca. 45 Mya (21), and between Southeast Asia and Australia, New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands that commenced ca. 15 Mya (4). The presence of Indo-Pacific forests in eastern continental Africa may either reflect eastern Gondwanan origin or dispersal within the Indo-Pacific region.

We also identified a group of locations in Asia and America that occupies cooler climates and higher elevations relative to the other identified forest clusters (Fig. 1 and Fig. S1), and which we therefore termed the Subtropical region. This Subtropical floristic region confirms the floristic link between Asia and North America, reflecting a shared boreotropical affinity (22). Within Asia, the Subtropical region is mostly restricted to the subtropics, with the exception of high-elevation forests of Java. In the Americas, by contrast, this floristic region extends from the subtropics deep into the tropics, probably because the cooler montane climate of the Central American highlands and South American Andes has facilitated the southward migration of coldadapted plant lineages. The absence of continuous, North–South-oriented mountain chains in Asia may have limited the dispersal of such lineages into lower latitudes.

#### Conclusion

We provide a phylogenetic distance-based biogeographic classification of the world's tropical forests, using the most extensive sampling scheme for the tropics currently in existence. Our results uncover floristic patterns which will help in the development of region-specific models for forest structure, diversity, and dynamics as well as possible responses of tropical forest regions to global environmental change. Our results may necessitate reconsideration of established biogeographic ideas. For example, Madagascar and New Guinea have often been considered two separate major tropical regions, ecologically and biogeographically distinct from tropical America, Africa, and Southeast Asia (23, 24). However, despite their highly endemic species compositions, we show that they are both part of the widespread Indo-Pacific floristic region. Finally, our analysis can serve as a model for classifying regional floras.

## **Materials and Methods**

Tree Inventory Dataset. Individual angiosperm trees (diameter at breast height ≥10 cm) from old-growth forest inventories throughout the (sub)tropics (between −35°S and 35°N latitudes) were pooled within their respective 1° latitude/longitude grid cells (henceforth called locations). These locations represented all major tropical forest regions and had broad environmental amplitude, including low to high elevations and dry to wet forests (Fig. S1). Monocots and Cactaceae were excluded because these were not consistently surveyed in all datasets. This dataset originally included 439 locations containing 925,009 individual trees belonging to 15,012 taxa. Species names were standardized using The Plant List (www.theplantlist.org), Taxonomic Name Resolution Service (tnrs.iplantcollaborative.org/TNRSapp. html), and Asian Plant Synonym Lookup (phylodiversity.net/fslik/synonym\_lookup.htm). On average, 1.4% of individual stems per location remained unidentified. These unidentified individuals were excluded from further analyses.

Community Phylogenetic Tree. The APG-III classification (25) served as the family-level backbone of our community phylogenetic tree. Recent updates in APG-IV (26) are mostly of nomenclatural nature and did not affect our analyses. This tree was further resolved up to genus level using the species-level phylogeny (32,223 species included) published by Zanne et al. (27), which covered most genera in our dataset (Dataset S1). Genera present in our dataset, but not in Zanne et al. (27), were placed at the base of their respective families. Genera that had disjunct species occurrences in the phylogeny of Zanne et al. (27) were placed at the most basal node connecting the disjunct species. This phylogeny was subsequently dated using the BLADJ function in Phylocom v4.2 (28), using taxon ages given in Magallón et al. (29) for the age file.

**Phylogenetic Distance Analysis.** Phylogenetic distance between all pairs of locations was calculated using the options COMDIST and COMDISTNT in Phylocom v4.2 (28). COMDIST uses the mean pairwise phylogenetic distance (MPPD); for each taxon in a location, it finds the average phylogenetic distance to all taxa in the other location, and calculates the mean. COMDISTNT uses the mean nearest taxon distance (MNTD); for each taxon in location 1, it finds the nearest phylogenetic neighbor in location 2, records this, and calculates the mean. Both functions return a symmetrical matrix of locations

versus locations with their pairwise phylogenetic distances. Principal coordinate (PCO) analyses (in MultiVariate Statistical Package v3.13; Kovach Computing Services) on resulting location versus location matrices showed that the MPPD matrices had almost no explanatory power (generally the first five PCO axes explained less than 5% of data variance), meaning that detected patterns were mostly random. The MNTD matrices, however, explained considerable amounts of data variance in the first five axes of the PCO. Therefore, we used only MNTD for further analysis.

Correcting for Taxon Richness Bias in MNTD. Taxon richness differed considerably between locations, varying between 4 and 1,466. MNTD may be sensitive to such differences in taxon richness because the chance of finding a close relative between two locations may increase when their taxon richness increases. Applying MNTD to determine phylogenetic distance between locations with differing taxon numbers could therefore result in taxon-rich locations being grouped together in the cluster analysis simply because they are more taxon-rich. To determine the impact of this effect, we created five "location-by-taxon" matrices, each with a lower number of taxa per location (320, 160, 80, 40, and 20 taxa per location), using the 41 locations containing more than 320 taxa. For each location, taxa were ranked according to abundance, so that the location-by-taxon matrix based on, for example, 320 taxa consisted only of the 320 most abundant taxa per location. Where tied abundances exceeded the predefined number of taxa, we randomly selected the appropriate number of taxa from among those with tied minimum abundance. We then calculated the MNTD matrices for each of these five location-by-taxon matrices and found that with increasing taxon richness of locations, MNTD (as averaged over all locations) decreased with increasing taxon richness per location following a power function [ $y=310.4x^{-0.194}$  (Fig. S4)], demonstrating that MNTD is indeed sensitive to taxon richness.

Determining the Optimal Number of Taxa per Location for Further Analysis.  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{To}}$ avoid taxon richness bias when using MNTD, locations had to be compared based on similar numbers of taxa. Minimum variance clustering, based on the five location-by-taxon matrices described earlier, consistently recovered the same major clusters in the same configuration (African and American locations clustered on one main branch and Asian locations clustered on the other), although the relationships between locations within these main clusters could vary (Fig. S5). Only in the 20-taxon analysis was one American location (location no. 165 from the Brazilian Atlantic Forest) placed in the Asian cluster. The amount of variance captured in the first five axes of a PCO analysis (using the same MNTD matrices) declined by only ~20%, from 83.3 to 60.7%, between the 320- and 20-taxon analyses, respectively. We decided to use 20 taxa per location in the final analyses (Table S1) because of this limited loss of information in the PCO and similarity of cluster results. In addition, we were able to use most of our locations (406 of the initial 439), including locations on remote islands and extreme habitats that would have been excluded if we had set the minimum number of taxa too high.

Forest Classification Analyses. For the final analyses, we produced 20 locationby-taxon datasets. In these datasets, each location was represented by 20 randomly drawn taxa (from that location). Random draws were irrespective of taxon abundance, as abundance is a spatially and temporally labile taxon trait that likely reflects contemporary environmental conditions rather than historical biogeographic signal. For each of these 20 location-by-taxon datasets, we calculated the corresponding symmetrical location-by-location matrices with their pairwise phylogenetic distances (MNTD). These matrices were then used as input for cluster analyses.

Locations were grouped in clusters using Ward's minimum variance method (30), using MultiVariate Statistical Package v3.13. This is a centroid-based clustering technique that identifies cluster centers (centroids) by minimizing the overall squared distances of the objects (in this case locations) to the centroids at each cluster level. This clustering technique identified spatially clearly defined location groupings (Fig. S2). The optimal number of clusters for defining floristic regions across the tropics was determined by calculating the cophenetic correlation coefficient at each cluster level, starting at the first split (K2) in the dendrogram. The cophenetic correlation coefficient calculates the correlation between the distance of the clusters as calculated by the clustering algorithm and the distance based on observed MNTD values between clusters. The higher the cophenetic correlation, the better the cluster result reflects the patterns present in the original distance matrix. We applied this method to each of our 20 datasets, calculated the average cophenetic correlation coefficient for each cluster level, and found a steep increase in cophenetic correlation up to K5, after which it slowly declined (Fig. S6). Therefore, we chose K5 as the optimum level for defining our main floristic regions across the tropics.

For each location, at cluster level K5, we determined the cluster in which it was classified for each of the 20 cluster analyses that we performed. The location was then assigned to the cluster in which it had the highest proportion of observations. A single proportion test (31), which calculates the probability of an observed (sample) proportion (in the range 0 to 1) against a hypothetical proportion, was then used to determine if the observed proportions were significantly higher than expected by random [Paleontological Statistics (PAST) v3.08; https://folk.uio.no/ohammer/past/]. For example, for K5, the expected random proportion of locations per cluster is 0.2. For a sample size of 20, a proportion has to be at least 0.38 to be significantly higher (P < 0.05) than the random expectation. The resulting classification success rates of locations for K5 are shown in Fig. S3 and Table S1. The final classification (K5) of the clusters was based on the majority consensus rule (Fig. 1).

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<sup>a</sup>Environmental and Life Sciences, Faculty of Science, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong BE1410, Brunei Darussalam; <sup>b</sup>Department of Botany and Plant Sciences, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521; Instituto de Investigaciones en Ecosistemas y Sustentabilidad, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 58190 Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico; decoraphy, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, United Kingdom; Center for Tropical Forest Science, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Ancon, Panama; <sup>f</sup>Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Research Program, Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja EC110103, Ecuador; <sup>9</sup>The Moore Center for Science, Conservation International, Arlington, VA 22202; <sup>h</sup>Graduate School of Science and Engineering, Kagoshima University, Kagoshima 890-0065, Japan; <sup>1</sup>Center for Tropical Research, Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095; <sup>1</sup>Forest and Environment Program, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor 16115, Indonesia; <sup>k</sup>Instituto de Ciencias Naturales, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Bogotá 111321, Colombia; <sup>1</sup>UNELLEZ-Guanare, Programa de Ciencias del Agro y el Mar, Herbario Universitario (PORT), Mesa de Cavacas, Estado Portuguesa 3350, Venezuela; <sup>m</sup>Compensation International Progress S.A.-Ciprogress Greenlife, Bogotá D.C., Colombia; <sup>n</sup>Departamento de Biología, Escuela Politécnica Nacional del Ecuador, Ladrón de Guevara E11-253, Quito, Ecuador; oSmithsonian's National Zoo, Animal Care Sciences, Primates, Washington, DC 20013-7012; plnstitute of Integrative Biology, Department of Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zurich, 8092 Zurich, Switzerland; QLandcare Research Manaaki Whenua, Lincoln 7640, New Zealand; 'Departamento de Biologia, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Lavras-MG, 37200-000, Brazil; 'Scentre for Landscape and Climate

Research, Department of Geography, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, United Kingdom; tlsotope Bioscience Laboratory (ISOFYS), Department of Green Chemistry and Technology, Faculty of Bioscience Engineering, Ghent University, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium; "Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiK-F), 60325 Frankfurt (Main), Germany; "Institute for Ecology, Evolution and Diversity, Goethe University Frankfurt, 60439 Frankfurt (Main), Germany; <sup>w</sup>Forest Ecology and Forest Management Group, Wageningen University & Research, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands; <sup>x</sup>Hardner & Gullison Associates, Victoria, BC V8P 1A9, Canada; <sup>y</sup>Ecology and Ecosystem Research, Georg August University Göttingen, Netneranas; "Hardner & Gullison Associates, Victoria, BC V8P 1A9, Canada; "Ecology and Ecosystem Research, Georg August University Göttingen, 37073 Göttingen, Germany; "School of Science and the Environment, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M1 5GD, United Kingdom; and Erology, Winrock International, St Dogmaels SA43 3 DT, United Kingdom; becosystem Management Unit, InnoTech Alberta, Vegreville, AB T9C 1T4, Canada; "Coppartment of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06269-3043; ddCollege of Environment and Ecology, Chengdu University of Technology, Chengdu 610059, China; eeForest and Wildlife Research Institute, 12101 Phnom Penh, Cambodia; ffDepartment of Botany and Plant Physiology, University of Buea, POB 63 Buea, Cameroon; ggWildlife Conservation Society-Program DR Congo, B.P. 14537 Brazzaville, DR Congo; hbpeartamento de Biología, Facultad de Ciencias y Tecnología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Herbario HULE, León 505, Nicaragua; iDivision of Biological Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 3QG, United Kingdom; iDBU Natural Heritage, German Federal Foundation for the Environment, 49090 Osnabrück, Germany; kkpNG Forest Research Institute, Lae 411, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea: "Center for Foological Sciences Indian Institute of Science Rangalore 560012 India: mm Department of Ecology and Environmental Papua New Guinea; "Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012, India; mmDepartment of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University, Puducherry 605014, India; nDepartment of Biological Sciences, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634; oBotany Department, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI 96822; PDepartamento de Ciencias Forestales, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Medellín, Colombia; qqLaboratório de Ecologia e Hidrologia Florestal, Floresta Estadual de Assis, Instituto Florestal de SP, 19802-970 Assis, SP, Brazil; <sup>rr</sup>Eichhorn Ecologie 3702 BK Zeist, The Netherlands; <sup>ss</sup>Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia–INPA, Araújo, CEP 69067-375 Manaus AM, Brazil; <sup>tt</sup>Kasuya Research Forest, Kyushu University, Sasaguri, Fukuoka 811-2415, Japan; "ulnstitute of Plant Sciences, University of Bern, 3013 Bern, Switzerland;" de Foresterie et Ingénierie du Bois, Université Nationale d'Agriculture, BP 45, Kétou, Benin; "WConservation Ecology, Faculty of Biology, Philipps-Universität Marburg, 35032 Marburg, Germany; \*\*Department of Biology, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL 33146; \*\*WWHF-Sweden/Världsnaturfonden WWF, Ulriksdals Slott, S-170 81 Solna, Sweden; \*\*ZDepartamento de Botânica, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Pampulha, 31270-901 Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil; <sup>aaa</sup>School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067, India; bbbDepartment of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90095; "CETERRA Teaching and Research Center, Central African Forests, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, University of Liège, B-5030 Gembloux, Belgium; <sup>ddd</sup>Department of Plant Biology, Faculty of Sciences, University of Yaounde Indian Professional Herbarium, Yaounde, BP 20818, Cameroon; <sup>eee</sup>National Herbarium, Yaounde, BP 20818, Cameroon; <sup>eff</sup>CREAF, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Cerdanyola del Vallès 08193, Spain; <sup>999</sup>Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Loja 1101608, Ecuador; <sup>hhh</sup>Mount Holyoke College Botanic Garden, South Hadley, Vallès 08193, Spain; <sup>999</sup>Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Loja 1101608, Ecuador; <sup>nnn</sup>Mount Holyoke College Botanic Garden, South Hadley, MA 01075; <sup>iii</sup>Department of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Science, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah 21589, Saudi Arabia; <sup>jij</sup>Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH3 5LR, United Kingdom; <sup>kkk</sup>World Agroforestry Centre, East and Southern Africa Region, Woodlands, Lusaka, Zambia; <sup>lii</sup>Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3RB, United Kingdom; <sup>mmm</sup>Department of Plant Systematics, University of Bayreuth, 95440 Bayreuth, Germany; <sup>nnn</sup>Plant Ecology, Albrecht von Haller Institute of Plant Sciences, Georg August University Göttingen, 37073 Göttingen, Germany; <sup>oco</sup>Biodiversity Parks Programme, Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems, University of Delhi, Delhi 110007, India; <sup>ppp</sup>Faculty of Forestry, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang-43400, Selangor, Malaysia; <sup>qqq</sup>Department of Forest Science, Tokyo University of Agriculture, Tokyo 156, PSD3, Jacobs (Fill MCAMB, Cidade University Tokyo University (Scorable), Secondard Compliance, Secondard (Compliance, Secondard Tokyo 156-8502, Japan; "'UNICAMP, Cidade Universitária Zeferino Vaz-Barão Geraldo, Campinas, Sao Paulo 13083-970, Brazil; sssGeographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing Department, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, Kerala 680653, India; \*\*\*Integrative Research Center, The Field Museum, Chicago, IL 60605; \*\*uuuuu Herbarium Bogoriense, Research Center for Biology, Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Cibinong 16911, Indonesia; w Computational and Applied Vegetation Ecology (CAVElab), Department of Environment, Faculty of Bioscience Engineering, Ghent University, Coupure Links 653, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium; www.Trinity Centre for Biodiversity Research, Trinity College, The University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland; xxxDepartment of Systematic and Evolutionary Botany, University of Zurich, 8008 Zurich, Switzerland; 1919 Agreca-Amazonica, Santa Cruz, Bolivia; 222 Bol Systematic and Evolutionary Bottanis, Onliversity of Edition, 5000 Earlies, Switchistic and Evolutionary Bottanis, Grandens and Domain Trust, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia; https://doi.org/10.1000/phi/scentre for Tropical Environmental and Sustainability Science and College of Science and Engineering, James Cook University. Cairns. QLD 4878, Australia; ccccSchool of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Scottsville 3209, South Africa; ddddDepartment of Plant Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia; Centre for Tropical Environmental and sustainability Science and Conege of Science and Engineering, James Cook University, Cairns, QLD 4878, Australia; CcccSchool of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Scottsville 3209, South Africa; dddd Department of Plant Biology, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, ME 04609; eeeeThe RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, United Kingdom; fffSchool of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom; gaggleror and Springer Science State Servety Administration, Institute, of Servety, Administration, Institute, Only Servety, Institute, Only United Kingdom; """"Facultad de Ciencias Forestales y Ambientales, Universidad de Los Andes, Merida S101-A, Venezueia; ""Key Laboratory or Forest Ecology and Environment of State Forestry Administration, Institute of Forest Ecology, Environment and Protection, Chinese Academy of Forestry, Beijing 100091, China; ""Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University, 8600 Silkeborg, Denmark; kkkkFaculty of Bioresources and Food Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, 20300, Besut Campus, Terengganu, Malaysia; "Forestry, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia; """Monosia; """Contre for Marine and Coastal Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Penang, Malaysia; oooCIRCLE, University of York, York Y010 5NG, United Kingdom; """College of African Wildlife Management, University of the Sunshine Coast, QLD 4556, Australia; """College of African Wildlife Management, Department of Wildlife Management, Moshi, Tanzania; ""Swing Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi, Belém PA, 66040-170, Brazil; """College of African Wildlife Management, Department of Ecología y Recursos Naturales, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ciudad de México, C.P. 04510, Mexico; """ Centre for Biosciences, Federal University of Pernambuco, Cidade University of Pernambuco, Loia Eculador; """ Commission des Forêts Ciencias, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ciudad de México, C.P. 04510, Mexico; universidad Nacional Recife PE, 50670-901, Brazil; wherbario Loja, Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja EC110103, Ecuador; where Coministion des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC), BP 20818 Yaoundé, Cameroon; pepartment of Ecology, Institute of Bioscience, University of São Paulo, 05508-900 São Paulo, SP, Brazil; pyyprograma de Pós-Graduação em Ecologia, Conservação e Manejo da Vida Silvestre (ECMVS), IBAM-Instituto Bem Ambiental, Belo Horizonte-Minas Gerais, 30360-310, Brazil; pyzer Root and Soil Biology Laboratory, Department of Botany, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore 641 046, India; asaalaboratorio de Ecología Terrestre, Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional (CINVESTAV), C.P. 927310 Mérida, México; bibbbb Department of Biology, Universitas Bangka Belitung (UBB), Kampus Merawang, Kepulauan Bangka Belitung 33172, Indonesia; cccc Programa de Pós Graduação em Ecología e Conservação, Universidade do Estado de Mato Grosso-UNEMAT, 78200-000 Cáceres, Mato Grosso, Brazil; diddd Faculty of Forestry, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan 20155, Indonesia; eeeee Department of Biodiversity, Evolution and Ecology of Plants, Biocentre Klein Flottbek, University of Hamburg, D-22609 Hamburg, Germany; fffff Institut Sophia Agrobiotech, 06903 Sophia Antipolis Cedex, France; gegggworld Resource Institute, Washington, DC 20002; hhhhh/Centre for Mountain Ecosystem Studies, Kunming fos0201, China; filii Departamento de Engenharia Florestal, Universidade de Brasília, 70910-900, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil; jiii Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708; kkkkk College of Biological Tog10-900, Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil; <sup>[jj]</sup>Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708; <sup>kkkkk</sup>College of Biological Sciences, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108; <sup>llll</sup>International Institute of Information Technology, Gachibowli, Hyderabad, Telangana 500032, India; <sup>mmmmm</sup>Sigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; <sup>nnnnn</sup>Bureau Waardenburg, 4100 AJ Culemborg, The 500032, India; mmmmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgiris, TN 643223, India; mummmSigur Nature Trust, Chadapatti, Masinagudi PO Nilgir delle Scienze, 38122 Trento, Italy; ""Cibodas Botanic Gardens, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Cipanas, Cianjur, West Java 43253, Indonesia; sssss\*Department of Geography and Geology, University of Turku, Turku, 20014 Turun yliopisto, Finland; \*\*ttt\*School of Environmental and Natural Resource Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia; \*\*uuuuuInstituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Espírito Santo, São João de Petrópolis, Santa Teresa, 29660-000, Brazil; \*\*\*\*\*\*Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies, University of Zurich, CH-8057 Zurich, Switzerland; WWWW/Departamento de Sistemática e Ecologia, Universidade Federal da Paraíba, 58051-900, Brazil; XXXXX Remote Sensing Department (DSR), National Institute for Space Research (INPE), São José dos Campos, São Paulo 12227-010, Brazil; XXXXX Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, United Kingdom; XXXXX Center for Development Research (ZEF), university of Bonn, 53113 Bonn, Germany; aaaaaa\*Chair of Nature Conservation and Landscape Ecology, University of Freiburg, 79085 Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany; bbbbbh.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, Blue River, OR 97413; cccccFaculty of Environmental Sciences and Natural Resource Management, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 1432 Ås, Norway; ddddddcirad-ES, Campus International de Baillarguet, TA C-105/D 34398 Montpellier Cedex 5, France; eeeeeeeDepartamento de Ecologia, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, CEP 59078-970, Brazil; ffffffworld Wildlife Fund Thailand, Bangkok 10400, Thailand; g99999Africa and Madagascar Department, Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, MO 63110; hhhhhhrederal University of Technology December 196813 460. Appreciation of the Part of Selfands of Selfands (1968) and 

Cambridge CB2 3EA, United Kingdom; memmin Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen, 1165 Copenhagen, Denmark; nonnenDepartment of Biological Sciences, Washington State University, Vancouver, WA 98686; occoon Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety, Authority, National Reference Centre, 6700HC Wageningen, The Netherlands; pppppp Research Institute for Sustainable Humanosphere, Kyoto University, Uji, Kyoto 611-0011, Japan; qqqqqscience, Technology and International Cooperation Department, Vietnam National University, Uji, Kyoto 611-0011, Japan; qqqqqscience, Technology and International Cooperation Department, Vietnam National University, Uji, Kyoto 611-0011, Japan; qqqqqscience, Technology and International Cooperation Department, Vietnam National University of Forestry, University, Uji, Kyoto 611-0011, Japan; qqqqqqScience, Technology and International Cooperation Department, Vietnam National University of Forestry, Hanoi 144, Vietnam; """Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; ssssss Department of Geography, University of Bergen, N-5020 Bergen, Norway; "ttttti Department of Forestry and Wood Technology, The Federal University of Technology, P.M.B. 704 Akure, Nigeria; "uuuuu Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, Boston, MA 02130; "vvvvv Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore, University, Providence, RI 02912; "xxxxxx School of Natural Sciences and Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool L3 3AF, United Kingdom; "yyyyy/Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics, University of Amsterdam, 1098 Amsterdam, The Netherlands; "zxzzzzz Instituto Politécnico Nacional, CIIDIR-Unidad Oaxaca, Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán, CP 71230, Oaxaca, Mexico; "aaaaaaaaDepartment of Floodplain Ecology, Institute of Geography and Geoecology, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, D-76437 Rastatt, Germany; bbbbbbb College of Agriculture and Forestry, Hainan University, Meilan Qu Haikou Shi, 570228, Hainan Province, China; "ccccccc Biosciences, Université Félix Houphouet-Boigny, Abidjan 22, Ivory Coast; dedddddd/Institute of Arts and Sciences, Far Eastern University, Manila, Philippines; and eeeeeeeeDepartment of Biology, American University of Beirut, Riad El-Solh, Beirut 1107 2020. Lebanon Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon

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# Correction

#### **ECOLOGY**

Correction for "Phylogenetic classification of the world's tropical forests," by J. W. Ferry Slik, Janet Franklin, Víctor Arroyo-Rodríguez, Richard Field, Salomon Aguilar, Nikolay Aguirre, Jorge Ahumada, Shin-Ichiro Aiba, Luciana F. Alves, Anitha K, Andres Avella, Francisco Mora, Gerardo A. Aymard C., Selene Báez, Patricia Balvanera, Meredith L. Bastian, Jean-François Bastin, Peter J. Bellingham, Eduardo van den Berg, Polyanna da Conceição Bispo, Pascal Boeckx, Katrin Boehning-Gaese, Frans Bongers, Brad Boyle, Fabian Brambach, Francis Q. Brearley, Sandra Brown, Shauna-Lee Chai, Robin L. Chazdon, Shengbin Chen, Phourin Chhang, George Chuyong, Corneille Ewango, Indiana M. Coronado, Jurgi Cristóbal-Azkarate, Heike Culmsee, Kipiro Damas, H. S. Dattaraja, Priya Davidar, Saara J. DeWalt, Hazimah Din, Donald R. Drake, Alvaro Duque, Giselda Durigan, Karl Eichhorn, Eduardo Schmidt Eler, Tsutomu Enoki, Andreas Ensslin, Adandé Belarmain Fandohan, Nina Farwig, Kenneth J. Feeley, Markus Fischer, Olle Forshed, Queila Souza Garcia, Satish Chandra Garkoti, Thomas W. Gillespie, Jean-Francois Gillet, Christelle Gonmadje, Iñigo Granzow-de la Cerda, Daniel M. Griffith, James Grogan, Khalid Rehman Hakeem, David J. Harris, Rhett D. Harrison, Andy Hector, Andreas Hemp, Jürgen Homeier, M. Shah Hussain, Guillermo Ibarra-Manríquez, I. Faridah Hanum, Nobuo Imai, Patrick A. Jansen, Carlos Alfredo Joly, Shijo Joseph, Kuswata Kartawinata, Elizabeth Kearsley, Daniel L. Kelly, Michael Kessler, Timothy J. Killeen, Robert M. Kooyman, Yves Laumonier, Susan G. Laurance, William F. Laurance, Michael J. Lawes, Susan G. Letcher, Jeremy Lindsell, Jon Lovett, Jose Lozada, Xinghui Lu, Anne Mette Lykke, Khairil Bin Mahmud, Ni Putu Diana Mahayani, Asyraf Mansor, Andrew R. Marshall, Emanuel H. Martin, Darley Calderado Leal Matos, Jorge A. Meave, Felipe P. L.

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The authors note that, due to a printer's error, an author name published incorrectly. The author name Lan Qi should instead appear as Lan Qie. The online version has been corrected.

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