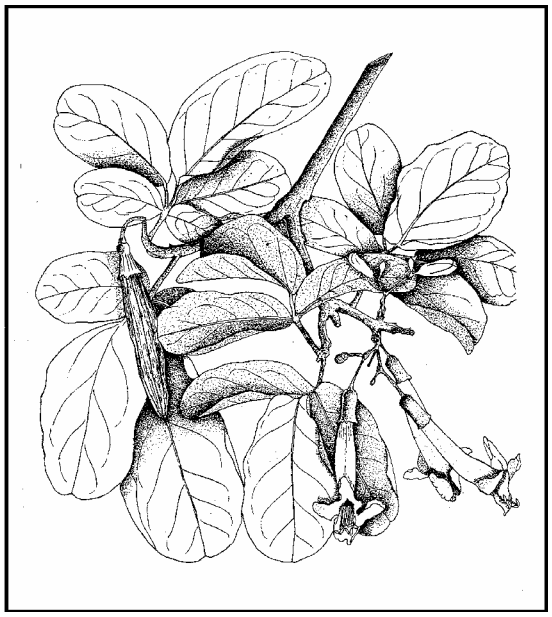
***Tabebuia haemantha* (Bertol. ex Spreng.) DC.** roble cimarrón
BIGNONIACEAE

Synonyms: *Bignonia haemantha* Bert. ex Spreng.
Tecoma haemantha (Bert.) Griseb.
Spathodea portoricensis Bello



General Description.—Roble cimarrón, also known as roble colorado and roble bobo, is a shrub or a small tree up to 8 m in height and 15 cm in basal diameter. Commonly, plants are 3 to 5 m in height and 4 to 8 cm in diameter. Young roble cimarrón usually have a single stem, until they have been damaged mechanically or by fire. Older plants often develop multiple stems by spontaneously sprouting just above the ground level. The bark is gray, smooth except for a slight fissuring. The inner bark is nearly white and slightly bitter. There are relatively few branches. The twigs are light gray and slightly flattened below the nodes. The species develops a tap and lateral root system. The roots are brown and flexible. Roble cimarrón is evergreen with palmately compound leaves. There are three or five stiff, leathery leaflets on a stout 2.5- to 5.0-cm petiole. The 3- to 15-cm long leaf blades are elliptic or ovate with entire edges and rounded to pointed at the tip. The inflorescences are panicles of several to many flowers on short branches. The flowers have a crimson, tubular corolla 3 to 5 cm long with five irregular lobes. The capsules are 6 to 11 cm long and contain many membranous two-winged seeds 1.9 cm long (author's observations, Liogier 1995, Little and Wadsworth 1964).

Range.—Roble cimarrón is endemic to the island of Puerto Rico. Specifically, the species is found in the dry forests in the southern and eastern parts of the island and the moist slopes above them, including serpentine areas in western Puerto Rico, and on the limestone hills in the northern coast and inland (Little and Wadsworth 1964, Vélez and van Overbeek 1950).

Ecology.—Roble cimarrón grows on loamy and clayey soils with pH's from about 5.5 to 7.5. It often occurs in sites that have been eroded and partially compacted by grazing animals. The soils where it grows today are usually steep and rocky. The species formerly inhabited all types of topography from near sea level to about 400 m in elevation. These sites receive from about 700 to 2100 mm of precipitation. In areas that receive the higher rainfall of the range, roble cimarrón tends to grow on excessively drained sites. The species is frequently common in overgrazed pastures indicating that it is unpalatable to cattle. Roble cimarrón is moderately intolerant of shade. It grows well in the open and in low basal area forest stands. Adult plants are usually found in codominant and intermediate crown positions in dry forests. It is top-killed by fires but sprouts vigorously afterwards.

Reproduction.—Flowering occurs almost throughout the year according to Little and Wadsworth (1964). However, most shrubs in particular areas appear to flower synchronously (author's observation). Hummingbirds, other bird species, and insects pollinate the flowers. Capsules form and mature about 6 weeks after flowering. They are green, turning tan at maturity, after which they quickly split open. The seeds adhere to a flat central placenta but detach and become airborne in the slightest breeze (Vélez and van Overbeek 1950). A sample of 17 capsules collected in Salinas, Puerto Rico contained an average of 59.9 $\pm$ 2.01 seeds/capsule. The air-dry seeds averaged

0.0148 ± 0.0003 g/seed or 68,000 seeds/kg. Sown on peat moss, these seeds germinated at 90 percent between 7 and 31 days after sowing. The species grows and survives well in the nursery, similar to other *Tabebuia* seedlings. In the wild, seedlings are well scattered and uncommon.

Growth and Management.—Roble cimarrón grows about 0.5 m/yr in early years after it is well established. It does not appear to be a long-lived species. Unfortunately, no plantations are known and no management experience has been reported.

Benefits.—Roble cimarrón would probably be suitable as an ornamental for background plantings in moist and dry frost-free areas. It would have the advantage of being drought-hardy and tolerant of infertile and partially compacted soils and should be a good species to plant in environmental restoration plantings within its native range. The light brown, hard wood is suitable for firewood and charcoal but is little used because of the plant's small size and relative scarcity.

References

Liogier, H.A. 1995. Descriptive flora of Puerto Rico and adjacent islands. Vol. 4. Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, PR. 617 p.

Little, E.L., Jr. and F.H. Wadsworth. 1964. Common trees of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Agriculture Handbook 249. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Washington, DC. 548 p.

Vélez, I. and J. van Overbeek. 1950. Plantas indeseables en los cultivos tropicales. Editorial Universitaria, Río Piedras, PR. 497 p.

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