

Palicourea tomentosa

Many, see text

Palicourea tomentosa, many synonyms, including *Psychotria poeppigiana*, is a plant species in the family Rubiaceae. A common name is sore-mouth bush,[1] though it is not very often used.

It ranges widely in the tropical Americas, from Chiapas, Oaxaca, Tabasco and Veracruz in Mexico to the very north of Argentina. It does not occur on the Pacific side of the American cordillera however, and is thus absent from El Salvador and Chile. It is probably also absent from Uruguay and Paraguay.[1]

Palicourea tomentosa is a large shrub. The inflorescences are carried upright or semi-erect and are surrounded by large bracts, colored a conspicuous red, that attract pollinators. The flowers themselves are inconspicuous, with the small yellow petals and sepals forming a narrow corollar tube. Pollinators are mainly hummingbirds, namely small hermit (*Phaethornithinae*) species like the black-throated hermit (*Phaethornis atrimentalis*), straight-billed hermit (*P. bourcieri*) and reddish hermit (*P. ruber*). They do not insert their bills deeply into the small flowers, and thus the pollinators of the sore-mouth bush include curved- and straight-billed species alike.[2]

This widespread plant has been described under a variety of names, today all considered synonyms:

In 2011, Hungarian botanist Attila Borhidi published reclassification of Mexican *Psychotria* species, transferring *Psychotria poeppigiana* into *Palicourea tomentosa* based on *Tapogomea tomentosa*. [3] This reclassification has been accepted by Kew. [4]

Local names include:

The Ka'apor people of Maranhão (Brazil) use its flowers as a "hunting fetish", a magical talisman to facilitate hunting. As the Tulane University anthropologist and historical ecologist William Balée describes it,

"... flowers of *Psychotria poeppigiana* [...] are wrapped in a piece of cloth and affixed to a dog's collar so that it may more easily find the enormous, highly desirable, and decidedly uncommon tapir"[6]

Palicourea tomentosa has several uses in folk medicine; it is widely used as a painkiller besides having some more specialized applications.[citation needed] The Tiriyo of Suriname crush and boil the plant and use the resulting decoction to treat headaches, sprains, rheumatism, muscular pains and bruises.[citation needed] The Wayana, also of Surinam, grind the bark and apply it raw to a particular rash known to them as poispoisi. The bracts are crushed to release the sap, which is then applied into the ear canal to relieve earaches.[citation needed] The decoction from the inflorescence, boiled whole, is credited with antitussive qualities and used as a whooping cough remedy and more generally to treat respiratory tract infections, as are decoctions of the leaves of ssp. *barcellana*. [5]

It also contains dimethyltryptamine,[citation needed] though as suggested by the use native peoples make of it probably not in quantities to render it strongly psychedelic.

Images:

