

## **Present Day Fact File**

### **Dipterocarp Seeds (two winged seeds)**

Many of the trees of the Borneo rainforest are large and straight-trunked, growing upwards fast so that they can reach the sunlight before their competitors. The base of the tree often has buttresses – like a cathedral – which help to keep it steady. These flared trunk bases are necessary as the tree roots cannot dig down far enough into the thin soil to hold the massive trees securely on their own.

Of course, growing so tall with all of the branches right at the top of the tree means that any fruit or seeds produced has a long way to fall before it reaches the ground. Some other trees have solved this problem by growing heavily reinforced structures around their seeds – like the ‘cannonball tree’. But this requires a lot of resources and so can put a limit on the number of seeds a tree produces. The Dipterocarp family have got round this problem by giving their seeds wings so that they can float down to the forest floor safely. This also means that they do not have to depend on animals or birds to spread their seeds over a wide area.

Most of these winged seeds have two long wings made of modified sepals, but some species have up to five wings on each fruit. The fruit itself tends to be a bit like an acorn, with a tough outer shell which the wings join onto. Each fruit generally carries just a few seeds, but the tree can produce a lot of these at once with little effort. Because of the tropical climate of Borneo, there is no particular fruiting season for trees, and so at most times during the year, you would see these fruits come spiralling down from the canopy and burying themselves into the leaf litter below.