

## Group or species name

*Cecropia peltata*

## Description

The cecropia tree is a tall and wiry tree with light gray bark and large lobed green leaves. The tree ranges from 5- 30 m tall (Canopy Family, 2020.). The tree produces fruits, as it is a tree with male flowers

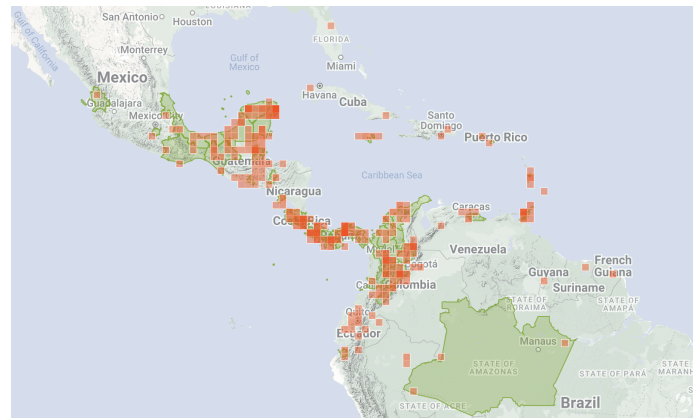


arranged in spikes and female ones arranged in ears (Naturalista CO, N.A.). When the flowers develop into fruits they are small and fleshy. These fruits are eaten by many different birds and mammals and are dispersed for reproduction in May and October (Naturalista CO, N.A.). If I were to create a working definition of how to identify the *Cecropia peltata*, I would want to look for the thin light barked trees with lobed green leaves that are found in sunny areas. It should be noted that identifying a cecropia tree might

be easy but distinguishing the different species of cecropia might prove difficult. According to the USDA, as many as 15,000 flowers may be produced per flower cluster, though the number of seeds that are able to mature fully is as low as 18% or 2,725 seeds per flower cluster (Silander & Lugo, N.A.).

## Distribution and Habitat

The *Cecropia peltata* ranges from Mexico to South America needing a neotropical climate. It's native specifically to Central America from Yucatan, Mexico to Costa Rica, as well as in South American countries like Venezuela, Brazil, and Columbia (Silander & Lugo, N.A.). They do best in a warm climate and can grow at elevations of more than 1,000 meters above sea level (Naturalista CO, N.A.). The tree is found in cloud forests, deciduous forests,



evergreen forests, and Moorish forests. Here in Monteverde, the tree flourishes in the cloud forest environment. The cecropia tree is a pioneer species, meaning it is typically found in cleared sunny areas. They dictate rapid forest regrowth as they quickly colonize cleared areas conserving nutrients, preventing erosion, and providing shade for future generations (Canopy Family, 2020). The main reason for the mortality of Cercropia trees in their seedling or sapling stage is when certain defoliation occurs from a

range of larvae (Silander & Lugo, N.A.). I have personally seen cecropia trees in many places around Costa Rica though the common factor in all their environments was the high amount of sun, like in the dry forest ecosystem.

## Natural history

Cecropia tree forms interesting relationships with other species, for example with arboreal ants, called Aztec ants. The tree and ant have a symbiotic relationship and the ant is housed in the Cecropia's hollow branches. The trees provide the ant species with special "food bodies" for them to eat. In turn, the ants help defend the trees from herbivorous predators (Canopy Family, 2020). The Cecropia also has a



relationship with the ground, as it is fast-growing and highly regenerative and can prevent erosions and hold nutrients in the soil (Silander & Lugo, N.A.). The wood of the cecropia tree sometimes called the trumpet tree, is used to make various things like instruments, floating vessels, medicines, etc. The cecropia tree is an important food source for many

animals like coatis, agoutis, monkeys, toucans, sloths, bats, opossums, and squirrels (Canopy Family, 2020). The animals that eat fruits of the cecropia tree then disperse their seeds in their droppings.

## References

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