

Haptanthus hazlettii, enigmatic central American plant, in the light of new findings

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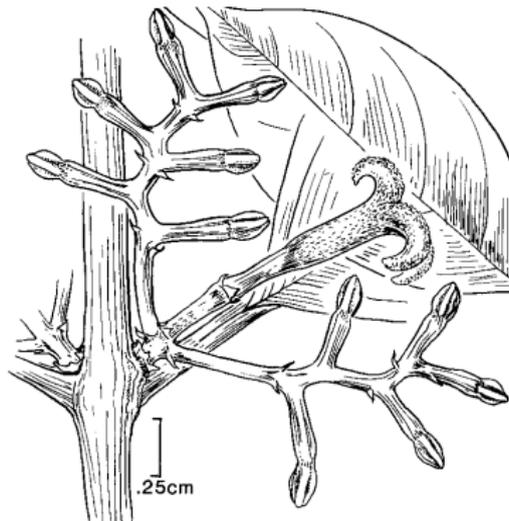
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Haptanthus hazlettii

- ▶ One of the most rare plants in the world
- ▶ Discovered in herbarium collections made in 1980 in North Honduras
- ▶ Has unique and unusual reproductive structures which is hard to interpret
- ▶ Did not appear to be a member of any described family of angiosperms

Peculiar flower morphology



Female organs (pistils with 3 carpels?) are surrounded by branched clusters of male organs (stamens??). In all, reproductive structures superficially resemble R. Melville's (1963, 1968) diagrams of flower evolution.

In search of relationships

- ▶ Basal eudicots? (perhaps, Buxaceae)— Doust & Stevens, 2005
- ▶ Salicaceae—Euphorbiaceae? (Malpighiales)— Goldberg & Alden, 2005

Dicotyledonous Family of Incertae Position

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1. *HAPTANTHACEAE*

C. Nelson 2002. (Isonym: Haptanthaceae Shipunov in Zhurn. Obshchei Biol. 64: 504, 2003, validated by a diagnosis in Latin). 1/1. Honduras (from 5 km south-east of Mataras, Alantida).

Evergreen glabrous tree. Vessels with scalariform perforations or scalariform and reticulate; scalariform

- ▶ Armen Takhtajan (2009) regarded *Haptanthus* as an only unplaced, *incertae sedis* family among angiosperms.

Northern Honduras, Atlantida



In the Northern Honduras, most of the forests, especially on the plains, are now cut

Search strategy



The main strategy was to search along borders of tree cuts/pastures/plantations. Most of flowering small trees are concentrated there

Finding

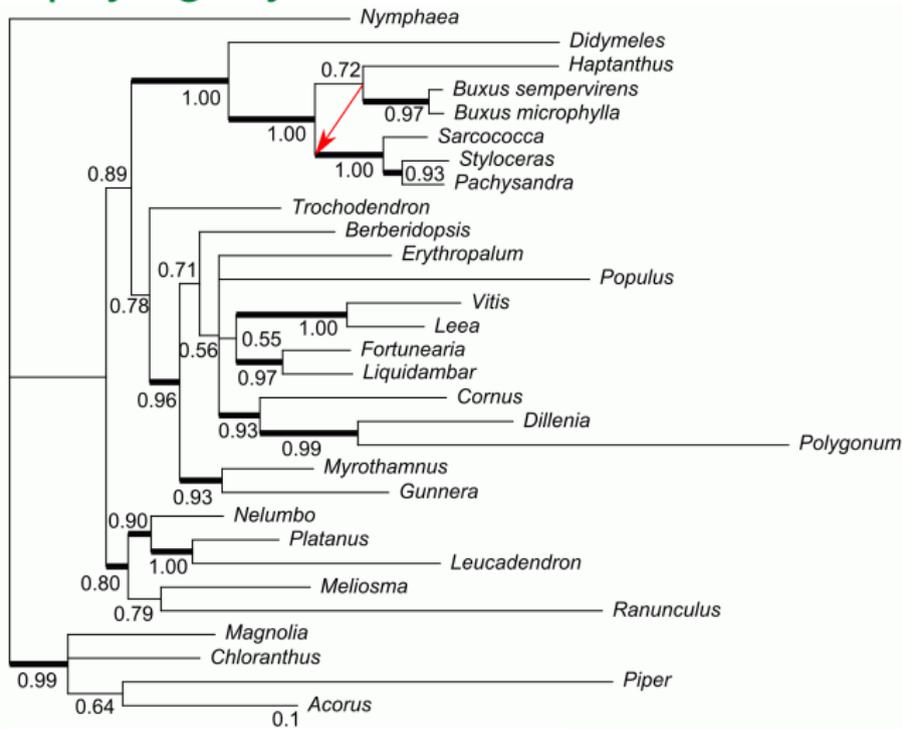


Finally, from the top of the hill (≈ 400 m altitude) we saw with binoculars unusual small tree, and that was *Haptanthus*!

Haptanthus is alive!

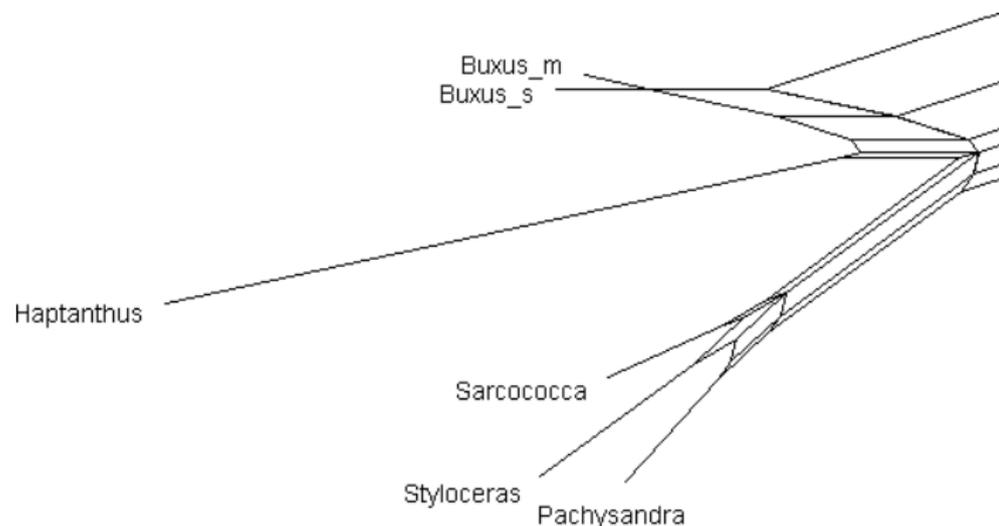


Molecular phylogeny: 100% Buxaceae



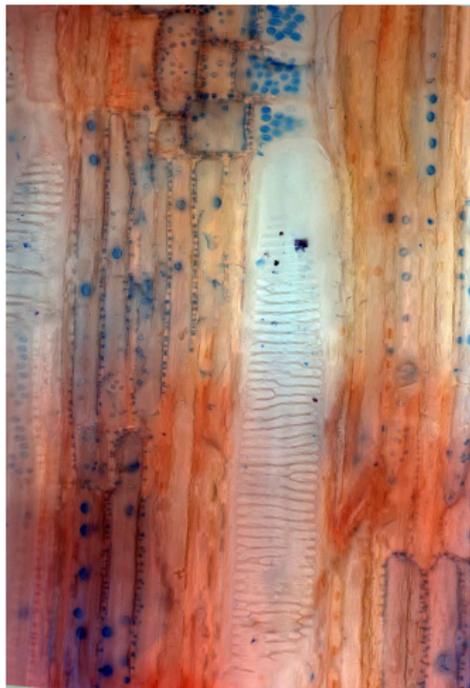
[From Shipunov & Shipunova, 2011]

Within a family, position is unstable



- ▶ Either *Buxus* branch, or *Sarcococca–Styloceras–Pachysandra* branch
- ▶ More markers are needed

Wood



- ▶ Vessel lumina narrow ($< 50 \mu\text{m}$), mostly solitary
- ▶ Axial parenchyma diffuse-in-aggregates
- ▶ Fibre walls with distinctly bordered pits
- ▶ Exclusively scalariform perforation plates with numerous (18–62) bars
- ▶ Multiseriate rays with long uniseriate wings composed of upright cells (Kribs' Heterogeneous Type I)

Wood structure



Flower morphology: *Haptanthus* vs. other Buxaceae

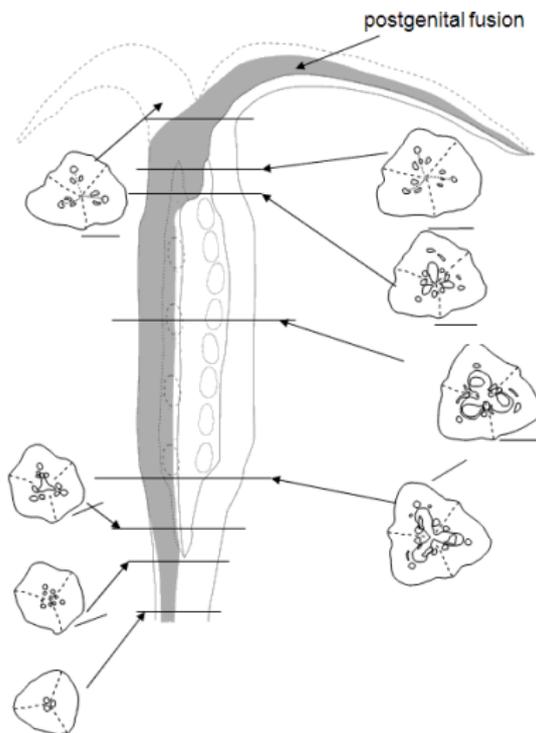
Pro:

- ▶ Flowers unisexual: all Buxaceae
- ▶ Inflorescence with terminal female flower and lateral male racemes: *Buxus*, *Notobuxus*, *Styloceras kunthianum*
- ▶ Male flower without prominent tepals and pistilode: *Styloceras*
- ▶ Male flowers with two stamens: 4 stamens in most Buxaceae, but variable stamen number (3–45) in *Styloceras*
- ▶ Tricarpelate female flowers: *Buxus* and others

Contra:

- ▶ Morphological nature of staminate flower in *Haptanthus* is obscure
- ▶ Gynoecium is distinctive: parietal placentation and 8–15 ovules per carpel vs. axile placentation and 2 ovules per carpel in other Buxaceae

Female flower



- ▶ Parietal placentation
- ▶ 8–15 ovules per carpel
- ▶ No synascidiate zone (only symplicate zone)
- ▶ Two rows of ovules in each carpel (cf. with two ovules per carpel in other Buxaceae)
- ▶ Vascular anatomy is also similar to other Buxaceae

