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SECONDARY VEGETATION IN AN ABANDONED SHIFTING CULTIVATION SITE IN THE SINHARAJA FOREST

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The structure and floristic composition of secondary vegetation in a shifting cultivation site, abandoned 25-30 years ago, in the Sinharaja Man and Biosphere Reserve, was investigated by plot sampling along transects.

This vegetation did not exceed 10m in height. Its total density was 339,360 individuals per ha; 98.5% of this was contributed by vegetation below 10cm girth at breast height (gbh) showing the paucity of the vegetation above this size class. Contribution of woody and herbaceous species to total density was 51% 49% respectively. Floristically, the vegetation represented 66 families, 109 genera and 134 species. The last included 66% primary forest species and 34% pioneer species.

The vegetation above 1m in height was dominated by individuals of pioneer species (77%), most common among them being *Schumacheria castaneifolia* Vahl. In contrast, vegetation below 1m in height was dominated by juveniles of primary forest species (62%). Several primary forest species in the above 10cm gbh category, such as

Anisophyllea cinnamomoides (Gardn. & Champ.) Alston, regenerated from coppice shoots.

Low stature and high density of individuals, with an abundance of small woody stems and herbaceous forms are typical of secondary vegetation. Slow recovery of the site despite the surrounding primary forest acting as a seed source, reflects the degree of its degradation after repeated burning and cultivation. Species which regenerate from coppice shoots recover quickly and are represented by high densities in successional sites and eventually in mature secondary forests as well. The role played by *Schumacheria castaneifolia*, an endemic genus, as the most common pioneer species may be of evolutionary importance.

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