**EPIPHYTIC LICHENS AS INDICATORS OF SUCCESSIONAL CHANGES IN LOWLAND RAIN FORESTS OF ECUADOR**

Jorge Déleg1; Gregorio Aragón2; Paolo Giordani3; Ángel Benítez1,4,\*

1Maestría en Biología de la Conservación y Ecología Tropical, Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Departamento de Ciencias Naturales, Herbario HUTPL, San Cayetano s/n, Loja, Ecuador;2Área de Biodiversidad y Conservación, Departamento de Biología y Geología, Física y Química Inorgánica, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Móstoles, 28933 Madrid, Spain; 3Departament of Pharmacy, University of Genoa, Viale Cembrano 4, 16148 Genoa, Italy; 4Biodiversidad de Ecosistemas Tropicales-BIETROP, Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja, Departamento de Ciencias Naturales, Herbario HUTPL, San Cayetano s/n, Loja, Ecuador. \*E-mail address: arbenitez@utpl.edu.ec (Á. Benítez)

Lichens are characteristic organisms in the Amazonian rain forests, thus are sensitive to environmental changes, and are considered effective bioindicators of forest disturbance. We analyzed the response of epiphytic lichens to forest succession in the Amazonian forests of Yasuni National Park (Ecuador). We assessed species richness and composition of cryptogams on the bases of trees (442) in three stage of forest succession (early, intermediate, late), using generalized linear mixed models and multivariate analysis. We registered 50 species of lichens and major changes in species richness and composition were correlated with changes in canopy openness relative to the shift from early to late stages of forest succession. Finally, we demonstrate for the first time the importance of tree species richness for lichen epiphyte richness in Amazonian rain forests.