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What are mangroves?

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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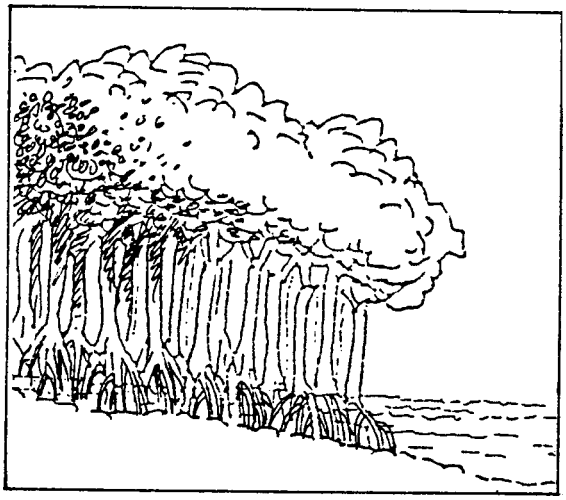


The term "mangrove" refers to a number of species of trees and shrubs that are adapted to the conditions of the intertidal zone. They are much more than collection of plants. Mangroves are important to people because they form the basis of highly complex and productive intertidal ecosystem. As major contributors to the system, they directly support local and offshore fisheries by providing physical protection to the coastal fringe from erosion and a habitat for wildlife.

Mangroves include mangrove swamps, mangrove forests or manglares. They are found along coastal waters, tidal flats, extending along rivers, streams and its tributaries where the water is brackish.

Mangrove areas are considered as one of the most productive ecosystems. They have a net primary productivity twice of the tropical grasslands. Mangroves are found in Asia, Oceania, West and East coasts of Africa, Northern Australia, New Zealand and Gulf of Aquaba in the Middle East.

Mangrove species

There are as much as 93 higher plant species; 43 mostly small to medium-sized trees, 9 shrubs and undershrubs, 13 vines, 3 palms, 12 herbs and 1 grass mangrove species growing and most of which are of economic and commercial value.

There are about 26 true mangrove species in the Philippines which are classified into the following major and minor elements:

Major elements:

A. Rhizophoraceae
1. *Rhizophora apiculata (Bakawan-lalaki)*
2. *R. mucronata (Bakauan-babae)*
3. *Bruguiera cylindrica (Pototan-lalaki)*
4. *B. gymnorrhiza (Busain)*
5. *B. Parviflora (Langai)*
6. *B. sexangula (Pototan)*
7. *Ceriops decandra (Malatangal)*
8. *C. tagal (Tangal)*

B.Avicenniaceae
9. *Avicennia alba (Api-api)*
10. *A. officinalis (Api-api)*
11. *A. marina (Bungalon)*

C. Sonneratiaceae
12. *Sonneratia alba (Pedada)*
13. *S. caseolaris (Pagatpat)*

D. Combretaceae
14. *Lumnitzera littorea (Tabau)*
15. *L. racemosa (Kulasi)*

E. Meliaceae
16. *Xylocarpus granatum (Tabigi)*
17. X. moluccensis (Piagau)

F. Palmae
18. *Nipa fruticans (Nipa)*

Minor Elements

G. Aegiceratacea
19. *Aegiceras floridum (Tinduk-tindkukan)*

H. Euphorbiaceae
20. *Excoecaria agallocha (Buta-buta)*

I. Rubiaceae
21. *Scyphiphora hydrophyllacea (Nilad)*

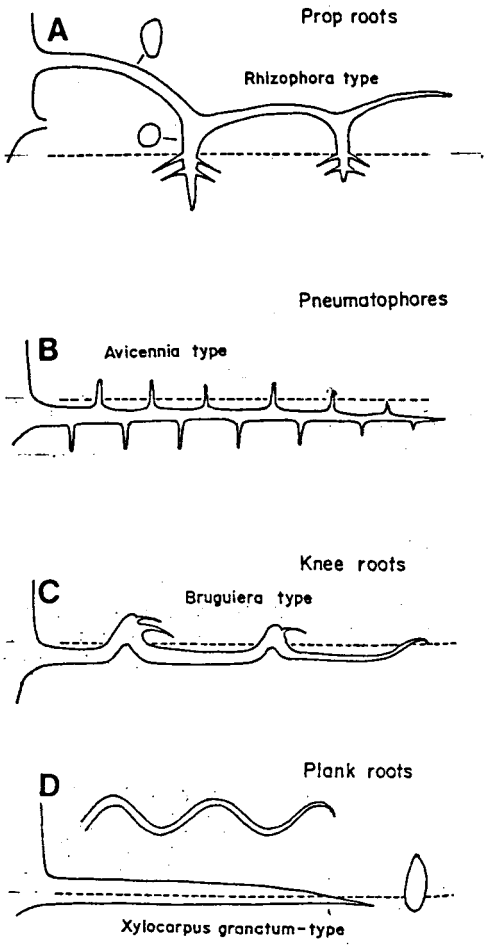
J. Myrataceae
22. *Osbornia octodonta (Tualis)*

K. Bombacaeae
23. *Camptostemon philippinensis (Gapas-gapas)*

L. Lythraceae
24. *Pemphis acidula (Bantigi)*

M. Pteridaceae
25. *Acrostichum aureum (Lagolo)*

N. Sterculiaceae
26. *Heritiera littoralis (Dungon-late)*



The aereal roots (top left) which serve as tube allow passage of air to the roots in the soil and development of seedlings from the fruit while still attached to the parent tree (left), are mangroves' remarkable adaptations to intertidal conditions. Above right are types of aereal roots, dotted lines are substrate level (based on Tomlinson, 1986. The botany of mangroves. Cambridge University Press.)