

1 **RESPONSES OF TREE SPECIES TRAITS TO SOIL VARIATION IN THE CERRADO**

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30
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36
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41

42 **Abstract**

43 Aims

44 The Cerrado is a rich tropical savanna in plant species and to understand how key functional traits
45 respond to soil variables can help to understand this hotspot functioning. This work aimed to answer i)
46 whether the Cerrado tree species respond to soil by functional traits, ii) how the functional traits respond
47 to soil variation in the Cerrado, and iii) whether the functional traits responses are interconnected.

48 Methods

49 We used an RLQ method to associate soil variables to functional traits and GLMs for additional analysis.
50 We used the nitrogen-fixing character as categorical trait and maximum plant height, maximum stem
51 diameter, stem elongation, leaf nitrogen, leaf carbon, leaf C/N, leaf $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and leaf $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ as continuous
52 traits.

53 Results

54 The RLQ showed that tree species responded to the soil variables with differences between nitrogen-
55 fixing species and other species. The increase of CEC and decrease of aluminium saturation induced an
56 increase of SLA and of stem elongation. CEC and aluminium saturation did not influence the leaf N%
57 and C%. The increase of soil inorganic nitrogen is associated to an increase of leaf N% and of leaf C%.
58 The C/N ratio explained negatively the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and the stem elongation variation. Nitrogen fixing species
59 presented low C/N ratios and high $\delta^{13}\text{C}$.

60 Conclusions

61 The relative disassociation of the variation of SLA and stem elongation (mostly driven by CEC and
62 aluminium variation) from the variation of N% and C% (mostly associated with inorganic nitrogen
63 variation) can be a result of enhanced water use efficiency in N-enriched plants.

64

65 **Keywords:** Nitrogen-fixing, Cerrado, functional traits, aluminium saturation, water use efficiency.

66

67 **Introduction**

68 The Cerrado is the largest savanna in the Neotropics, a biodiversity hotspot for plants (Simon et al.
69 2009; Souza-Neto et al. 2016; Françoso et al. 2019) and strongly influenced by many soil variables
70 (Rossatto et al. 2012; Franco et al. 2014). Despite some studies have demonstrated the soil-plant
71 relationship in the Cerrado (de Assis et al. 2011; Neri et al. 2012; Meira-Neto et al. 2017). the studies that
72 evaluate the specific response of plant functional traits to the soil properties variability are still limited. In
73 such complex hotspot, to decrease the information from the high number of variables and species to few
74 key functional traits responding to variables can help to understand the environmental influence on plants
75 (Díaz and Cabido, 2001; Lavorel and Garnier, 2002).

76 Functional traits are key characteristics that allow trees to deal with the environment (Baraloto et al.
77 2012). The specific leaf area (SLA) is a synthetic leaf trait that responds congruently throughout different
78 biomes, climates and latitudes to resource availability (Reich et al. 1997). SLA is positively related to
79 light use efficiency, to productivity, to competitive ability and negatively related to stress tolerance and to
80 leaf lifespan (Wright et al. 2001; Valladares and Niinemets 2008). Stem elongation expressed as a ratio of
81 maximum plant height to maximum stem diameter (H_{max}/D_{max}) is a trait positively related to light
82 competition ability (Bagousse-Pinguet et al. 2017; Candido et al. 2019) and to resource availability
83 (Goldstein et al. 2019; Khan et al. 2020). The leaf contents of nitrogen (N%), carbon (C%) as well as the
84 carbon to nitrogen ratio (C/N) indicate the nutrient status for plants and the stress level. The N% and C%
85 are positively related to nutrient status of leaves and the C/N is positively related to the nutrient limitation
86 (Cornelissen et al. 2003; Pérez-Harguindeguy et al. 2013). Together, the traits separately or combined as
87 ratios should show the main strategies of plants responding to soil variability in the Cerrado with leaf
88 (SLA), stem (H_{max} / D_{max}) and root (nutritional status) functioning in a comprehensive analysis
89 (Westoby 1998) of the environment in which the Cerrado plants are found.

90 Besides the continuous functional traits, functional categories have been used for the tree species
91 of Cerrado. The nitrogen-fixing leguminous can be understood as a functional group of trees species that
92 occur throughout Cerrado physiognomies and dominate the dense woodlands on acidic dystrophic soils
93 called Dystrophic Cerradoes (Meira-Neto *et al.*, 2017), but little is known besides the nitrogen-fixing
94 trait. Dystrophic Cerradoes are dominated by nitrogen-fixing leguminous trees (Goodland 1971; Oliveira-
95 Filho and Ratter 2002; Meira-Neto et al. 2017) and have high abundance of trees, with much higher
96 biomass than open Cerrados, occur on deep acidic dystrophic soils with high levels of Al^{3+} and with high
97 levels of inorganic nitrogen.

98 Functional ecology in the Cerrado has described vegetation functioning (e.g., Franco et al. 2014;
99 Meira-Neto et al. 2017) and ecological processes (Freitas et al. 2012) by models. Thus, models are tools
100 for the Cerrado understanding in different scenarios, but the soil complexity in a plant diversity hotspot
101 hinder the functional understanding blurring the plant-soil relations. The Cerrado complexity can be
102 disentangled by the use of by functional traits of plants. Few vegetative traits of leaf (e.g., specific leaf
103 area - SLA) and stem (e.g., stem elongation) as well as the percentage of carbon and nitrogen and their
104 stable isotopes in plants are key traits (Westoby 1998; Máguas and Griffiths 2003; Franco et al. 2014;
105 Meira-Neto et al. 2017, 2018) related to plant growth and can help to understand the general functional
106 effects of soil on plants.

107 This research aimed to answer i) whether the tree species in the Cerrado respond to soil variation by
108 responsive functional traits, ii) how the studied functional traits respond to soil variation in the Cerrado,
109 and iii) if the functional traits responses to soil variation are interconnected or disconnected from each
110 other in the Cerrado. We studied a Cerrado with a wide range of soil characteristics within an area
111 without climatic, topographical and dispersion limitation biases and with negligible disturbances, a
112 suitable system for increasing knowledge regarding plant functional responses to soil variation.

113 **Material and methods**

114 **Study area**

115 The study was carried out in the Paraopeba Reserve with an area of 200- ha in the state of Minas
116 Gerais (19°20'S, 44°20'W), Brazil. The climate of the region is classified as Aw (tropical humid) by the
117 Köppen system with a rainy summer from October to April and a dry season from May to September. The
118 mean annual temperature and mean annual rainfall are 20.9°C and 1328 mm, respectively. The vegetation
119 of the reserve is the product of regeneration after clear-cutting in 1952. There are records of fires in 1960
120 and 1963, since which the area as a whole has been protected from fire (Neri et al. 2012).

121 We carried out the study on a wide range of soils spread over a short distance, where differences
122 in vegetation are ascribed to soil attributes since variation in climate and topography was negligible (Neri
123 et al. 2012).

124 The soils are classified as i) dystrophic Haplic Cambisol, ii) Yellow Latosol, iii) Red-Yellow
125 Latosol, iv) dystrophic Red Latosol and v) mesotrophic Red Latosol (EMBRAPA 2006; Neri et al. 2012).
126 Along this gradient the dark-redder the soil the greater the biomass and density of woody plants. Colluvial
127 materials from weathered limestone or *in situ* alteration of such calcareous rocks influence both eutrophic
128 and dystrophic red soils. On the other hand, Cerrado savannas are related to either shallow or deep

129 yellowish soils (Cambisols/Latosols) developed from slate, a pelitic Al-rich nutrient-poor metamorphic
130 rock. Since there is a wide range of soil characteristics within a small area, this fragment of Cerrado is a
131 suitable system for increasing knowledge regarding plant functional groups with different strategies for
132 resource use and stress tolerance without climatic, topographical and dispersion limitation biases.

133 **Sampling plants and soil**

134 We used 75 plots (20-m x 20-m) in the Paraopeba Reserve in order to know which woody
135 species were the dominant. As 75% of dominance is the lower limit for the highest level of dominance for
136 sampling vegetation methods as Braun-Blanquet and Domin-Krajina (Mueller-Dombois and Ellenberg
137 2003; Maarel 2009), we considered as rulers of the Cerrado functioning the species that collectively
138 comprise ~ 75% (i.e., 74.06%) of the abundance. We used data from a previous survey on 3 hectares with
139 15 plots of 20-m x 20-m on each soil type, 75 plots in total. We found 14,671 individuals of 174 woody
140 species of 51 families in the woody communities of the studied vegetation. Of these, 10,866 individuals
141 belonged to the 34 species that made up 74.06% of the total abundance of the community. We used the 75
142 plots only to choose that 34 species with ~75% of abundance. From those 75 plots, we only used 24 plots
143 to analyze soils, light and to take leaf samples of the most abundant species (i.e., dominant species).

144 The structure of the woody plants was evaluated by equally distributing 24 plots (20-m x 20-m)
145 along the aforementioned soil gradient. We sampled three plots of Inceptisol (Cambisol), three plots of
146 mesotrophic Red Latossol, three plots of dystrophic Red Latossol, six plots of Yellow Latosol and nine
147 plots for Red-Yellow Latossol (Yellow Latosol and Red-Yellow Latosol are intermediary soils with more
148 plots to better represent the intermediate portion of the gradients). All plots were randomly selected inside
149 soil types areas. The soil characterization is in previous publications (Neri et al. 2012, 2013). From July
150 2011 to September 2012 we recorded all individual woody plants with stem circumferences equal to or
151 greater than 10 cm at ground level as usual in Cerrado. The classification of species into families
152 followed APG IV (The Angiosperm Phylogeny Group 2016), with the nomenclature of species and
153 abbreviations being in agreement with Brazilian Flora Checklist (www.floradobrasil.jbr.gov.br).

154 Soil samples were collected from all 20-m x 20-m plots, each one comprising 10 merged
155 subsamples from a depth of 0–10 cm. Soil samples taken for chemical analysis were air-dried and sieved.
156 Since Cerrado soils generally possess low nutrient status and fertility, which have been shown to
157 influence its vegetation, we used cation exchange capacity (CEC), inorganic N and pH as proxies for soil
158 fertility. Furthermore, since aluminium saturation determines the fraction of Al^{3+} in CEC, it was

159 considered a main soil factor. The pH values were obtained from aqueous solution while inorganic N was
160 gathered from the sum of nitrate (NO_3^-) and ammonium (NH_3) content. Colorimetric analyses were used
161 for measuring NO_3^- and NH_3 . All analyses were performed in the Soil Laboratory at the Universidade
162 Federal de Viçosa, following methods for Brazilian tropical soils (EMBRAPA, 1997).

163 164 **Functional traits**

165 We evaluated functional traits of 34 most abundant species, which accounted for 74.06% of the
166 cumulative relative abundance in the Cerrado of Paraopeba Reserve. All individuals of selected species
167 were assessed and sampled for measuring traits. The functional traits were calculated from direct
168 measurements from each one of the 3796 sampled individuals.

169 Trait-based analysis requires selection of critical traits to the community processes of interest
170 (Kraft et al. 2007). Concerning the Cerrado, key functional traits should enable plants to grow in stressing
171 conditions in poorer soils without light competition and to compete in less stressing soils, but with more
172 light competition. Six key traits (Table 1) related to competitive ability, resources use and tolerance were
173 used (Cianciaruso et al. 2012; Pérez-Harguindeguy et al. 2013). The traits were measured by widely
174 accepted methods (Cornelissen et al. 2003; Pérez-Harguindeguy et al. 2013). The sampling was plot-
175 specific, which allowed us to assess environmental factors (Cianciaruso et al. 2009). We used the tag
176 nitrogen-fixing for nodulating leguminous trees (Sprent 2009; Meira-Neto et al. 2017) for sampled
177 species (Appendix S1).

178 **Carbon, nitrogen and stable isotopes analyses ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$)**

179 We used stable isotopes analyses in order to understand the conditions of functional groups and
180 set of species in each plot under different soil and light conditions. Three leaves healthy and fully
181 developed from all individuals sampled in each plot were taken during the rainy season (March of 2013)
182 totalizing 3796 individuals. The leaves were sampled at a similar distance from the ground and at the
183 north side of the canopy. The leaves were dried to constant weight (65°C) without petioles and midribs
184 and ground to a powder using a ball mill (Retsch, Haan, Germany) for measuring carbon, nitrogen, $\delta^{13}\text{C}$
185 and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$. Nitrogen and carbon concentration and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ were analysed using an elemental
186 analyzer (HEKAtech, Weinberg, Germany) with a continuous-flow stable isotope ratio mass spectrometer
187 (ISOPRIME, GV, Manchester, UK) and measured against an ammonium sulphate standard (IAEA.N2). C
188 and N isotope ratios were presented in δ notation:

189

190 $\delta^{13}\text{C sample} = R_{\text{sample}} - R_{\text{standard}} / R_{\text{standard}}$

191

192 where R_{standard} is the $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$ of Pee Dee Belemnite (PDB) and R_{sample} is the $^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$ ratio of the sampled
193 leaves.

194

195 $\delta^{15}\text{N sample} = R_{\text{sample}} - R_{\text{standard}} / R_{\text{standard}}$

196

197 where R_{standard} is the $^{15}\text{N}/^{14}\text{N}$ ratio of atmospheric N_2 and R_{sample} is the $^{15}\text{N}/^{14}\text{N}$ ratio of the sampled leaves.

198 The repeated measurement precision was 0.2 ‰.

199

200 **Responses of functional traits**

201 In order to encompass species that are placed similarly along the gradient and that were
202 functionally tagged, we constructed a numerical matrix, with averaged values of SLA, ratio of maximum
203 height to maximum diameter (Hmax/Dmax) as stem elongation measurement, leaf N% and leaf C%, as
204 individual-weighted means in plots for the 34 dominant species (Appendix S1). We did not use the C/N
205 because of the redundancy with leaf N% and leaf C%. We used the tags of nitrogen-fixing and other for
206 the sampled species. In order to correlate to test directly the soil influences on the functional responses we
207 performed a predictive fourth-corner approach proposed by (Brown et al. 2014) combined with RLQ
208 analysis that integrate correspondence analysis, Hill ordination and PCA to produce a canonical ordination
209 with the dispersions of species, of environmental variables and of functional traits respectively (Dray et
210 al. 2014). RLQ analysis was carried out using the functions ‘dudi.coa’, ‘dudi.hillsmith’, ‘dudi.pca’ and
211 ‘rlq’ of the ade4 package (Dray et al. 2018) for canonical ordination of species abundances, functional
212 traits (SLA, Hmax/Dmax, %C and %N), plots and three soil variables (CEC, aluminium saturation and
213 inorganic nitrogen, all square-rooted transformed). The Fourth-corner analysis was carried out using the
214 ‘fourthcorner’ function of the Ade4 package performing 50 000 permutations with FDR adjustment of P
215 values in order to avoid type I error for multiple comparisons between the soil variables and the
216 functional traits of the RLQ analysis (Peres-Neto et al. 2017; Braak et al. 2018). All analyses were
217 performed within the R statistical environment (R Development Core Team, 2015).

218 In order to show how the functional traits are associated to each other, we performed global
219 GLMs with each trait as response variable against the others as explaining variables (leaf N %, leaf C %,
220 leaf C/N, SLA, stem elongation, $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$) using the ‘glm’ function of the lme4 package with

221 gaussian error distribution (R Development Core Team 2015). We used the ‘dredge’ function from the
222 MuMIn package (Bartón 2018) to select the combinations of three or less uncorrelated predictor variables
223 with $r < 0.6$ according to a protocol (https://github.com/rojaff/dredge_mc) to avoid overfitting since we
224 have measurements for 34 species. Best models were selected using AIC (Symonds and Moussalli 2011),
225 and all selected models with ΔAIC lower than 2 were considered equally good. When more than one
226 model was selected, we calculated a conditional model-averaged estimates using the ‘model.avg’ function
227 from the MuMIn package with the significance of each predictor evaluated using likelihood ratio tests
228 (Bartón 2018).

229

230 **Results**

231 The canonical RLQ ordination showed that tree species responded to the soil variables.
232 Nitrogen-fixing species were associated with higher carbon and nitrogen percentages in their leaves while
233 other species were mainly ordinated along the axis associated to stem elongation and to SLA variation
234 with *Magonia pubescens* at the score of the highest values of SLA and stem elongation and *Salvertia*
235 *convallariodora* at the score of the lowest values of SLA and stem elongation (Figure 1).

236 The fourth-corner analysis showed that the CEC in soil is positively related to SLA and to stem
237 elongation (Hmax/Dmax) on Cerrado trees. On the other hand, the aluminium saturation in soil is
238 negatively related to SLA and to stem elongation on Cerrado trees (Figure 2) unveiling an opposite effect
239 of CEC. CEC and aluminium saturation did not influence the leaf N% and C%. The soil inorganic
240 nitrogen is positively related to leaf N% and to leaf C% (Figure 2) according to the fourth-corner analysis.

241 The GLMs shown that stem elongation responded also positively to leaf N% and negatively to
242 leaf C/N showing that stem elongation is somehow associated with leaf nitrogen status (Figure 3A). SLA,
243 $\delta^{13}C$, leaf C% and $\delta^{15}N$ were also associated to stem elongation variation but were not significant in the
244 averaged models. The leaf C/N is negatively related to $\delta^{13}C$ (Figures 3 and 4) despite $\delta^{15}N$, stem
245 elongation, C% and SLA also appear in the selected models without significance in averaged models
246 (Figure 3B). The leaf C% as well as C/N were associated to leaf N% (Figure 3C). Leaf N% and C%
247 obviously explained C/N (Figure 3D). The nitrogen fixing species presented low C/N ratios and high
248 $\delta^{13}C$ proportions (Figure 4).

249

250 **Discussion**

251 SLA and stem elongation were the functional traits that responded to the variation of CEC and of
252 aluminium saturation in soil. The more fertile soils with higher CEC and lower aluminium saturation
253 cause elongated stems as well as cause high SLA expected in more productive ecosystems (Reich et al.
254 1997; Westoby 1998). Stem elongation also positively associated to leaf nitrogen status. Leaf N% content
255 and leaf C% were positively associated with soil inorganic nitrogen, all of them possibly interconnected
256 in a two-way nitrogen exchange between the soil pool and the biomass pool enhancing the photosynthetic
257 activity that captures atmospheric carbon (Wright et al. 2003; Bustamante et al. 2006). The
258 CEC/aluminium saturation influences SLA/stem elongation rather independently from the influence of
259 soil inorganic nitrogen on leaf N% and leaf C%.

260 The high SLA (i.e., short leaf lifespan) is associated with some species such as *Magonia*
261 *pubescens*, *Luehea divaricata* and *Dilodendrum bipinatum* that are commonly found in tropical dry
262 forests (Oliveira-Filho et al. 2006) and suggests high productivity (Reich *et al.*, 1997) together with high
263 stem elongation. Nitrogen fixers presented high leaf N%, high C% and intermediate situations of SLA
264 and of stem elongation in the studied Cerrado. The most elongated species dominate the most fertile
265 soils with high CEC (i.e., Mesotrophic Red Latosol) and the nitrogen fixers dominate the poorer
266 Dystrophic Red Latosol with medium-to-high CEC (Meira-Neto et al. 2017). The SLA and stem
267 elongation are functional traits that are related to competitive ability for light, to long lifespan and to
268 habitats with high productivity (i.e., high SLA; Westoby 1998; Moles et al. 2009; Pérez-Harguindeguy et
269 al. 2013; Kunstler et al. 2016). Therefore, species with higher SLA and more elongated stems seem to be
270 more competitive than nitrogen-fixers in soils with higher CEC and lower aluminium saturation. On the
271 other hand, nitrogen-fixers dominate Dystrophic Cerradoes possibly using their N-enriched leaves to be
272 more efficient in the CO₂ use (i.e., more C%) in that very acidic soil.

273 Our RLQ results reinforce the CEC as a synthesis of soil fertility explaining plant responses in
274 Cerrado (Neri *et al.*, 2013) and reinforce the understanding that exchangeable aluminium is a main source
275 of stress for woody plants in tropical savannas on acidic soils (Furley and Ratter 1988; Motta et al. 2002;
276 Sugihara et al. 2014). The exchangeable aluminium is not only a stressor in the Cerrado but also in many
277 other vegetations worldwide and the results found for Cerrado can be found in other vegetations on acidic
278 soils (see Watanabe and Osaki 2002; Kochian et al. 2004). According to our findings, soils with low CEC
279 and with toxic levels of Al³⁺ are associated with less elongated stemmed trees with lower SLA and

280 additionally can cause open physiognomies (see Goodland and Pollard, 1973; Ruggiero *et al.*, 2002; Neri
281 *et al.*, 2012) with less biomass and less abundances of woody plants (Silva *et al.*, 2013) worldwide.

282 Nitrogen-fixing trees were associated to high leaf contents of nitrogen and carbon. Their low leaf
283 C/N and high leaf N% are congruent with the nitrogen-fixing function (Bustamante *et al.* 2004, 2006) as
284 well as with the high inorganic nitrogen contents in soil. This relation is possibly interconnected in a two-
285 way nitrogen exchange between the soil nitrogen pool and the biomass nitrogen pool. From the
286 leguminous species of this study, only *Copaifera langsdorffii* may not be a nitrogen-fixer (Sprent 2009)
287 but behave as the other leguminous tree species in our analyses and deserves attention in future studies on
288 nitrogen-fixing species.

289 Despite the reported evidence of nitrogen-fixing by nodulated genera in the Cerrado (Sprent *et*
290 *al.* 1996), our results of leaf $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ were not significantly related to the studied functional traits. The
291 proportion of this stable isotope should be further studied in soil and plants to determine whether the
292 sources of N for the different species are the same (Marshall *et al.* 2007; Craine *et al.* 2015) and whether
293 there are ecological processes involved in nitrogen uptake by non-nitrogen-fixing plants.

294 The negative relation found between C/N and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ show that the lower the N nutritional status,
295 the lower the ^{13}C proportion in leaves. A possible explanation of very low $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in some species may be
296 that deep roots can access water during the dry season on deep soils in open Cerrado (Rawitscher *et al.*
297 1943; Ferri 1944; Rachid 1947; Rossatto *et al.* 2012). Therefore, low ^{13}C proportion might be caused by
298 high stomatal conductance because high CO_2 assimilation lowers the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in biomass as Rubisco freely
299 discriminates and prefers ^{12}C to ^{13}C (Kohn, 2010). High N% is associated with high $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ because higher
300 nitrogen status in leaves may enhance drought tolerance (Wright *et al.* 2001, 2003) and should be further
301 investigated in nitrogen-fixers and calcicole as they presented lower C/N than other species ($p=0.0317$,
302 GLM, gaussian distribution, results not shown). High $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ in leaves allows more time of stomatal
303 closure causing higher water use efficiency (Goldstein *et al.* 1989; Scartazza *et al.* 1998). Therefore, our
304 results show that nitrogen-fixing species have higher $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ possibly as a consequence of stomatal closure
305 responding to water limitation in soil followed by an intense CO_2 depletion in N-enriched leaves
306 pumping ^{13}C into photosynthesis, a trait of plants that tolerate longer periods of water stress (Werner and
307 Máguas 2010; Máguas *et al.* 2011). Thus, higher $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ values suggest longer periods of biomass
308 incorporation (Goldstein *et al.* 1989; Scartazza *et al.* 1998; Coletta *et al.* 2009) as well as different

309 phenological developments (Werner and Máguas 2010) in tree species of Cerrado and show that $\delta^{13}\text{C}$
310 variation is associated to N%, C% and C/N variation.

311 The relative disassociation of the SLA and stem elongation variation (driven by CEC and
312 aluminium variation) from the N% and C% variation in leaves (associated to the variation soil inorganic
313 nitrogen) appears in RLQ. However, stem elongation is also influenced by leaf N% and C/N according to
314 GLMs indicating that all functional traits may be more or less associated in their variations responding to
315 the main soil variables. However, the relative disassociation unveiled by the fourth-corner analysis can be
316 a result of high water use efficiency of leguminous nitrogen-fixing species as they are N-enriched plants
317 even in the Cerrado acidic soils with high aluminium saturation.

318

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- 517

518 **Table 1.** Plant traits used to analyze functional groups of a Cerrado community at Paraopeba Reserve,
519 Minas Gerais. (*) indicates a trait that was not directly used in the data analysis, but which is
520 part of a rate. SLA = specific leaf area, Hmax = maximum height, Dmax = maximum diameter,
521 C/N = carbon to nitrogen ratio of leaf.

Trait	Unit	Functional significance
1. SLA	mm ² .mg ⁻¹	Correlated with aspects of physiology related to the efficiency of resource uptake and use
2. Hmax*	m	Competitive vigour and ability to persist after disturbances
3. Dmax*	cm	
4. Hmax/Dmax	-	Stem elongation considering vertical/horizontal growth
5. C%	-	Indicates leaf carbon content, proxy of polysaccharides and photoassimilates
6. N%	-	Indicates leaf nitrogen content, proxy of nutritional status
7. C/N	-	Indicates nitrogen limitation, proxy of nutritional status

522

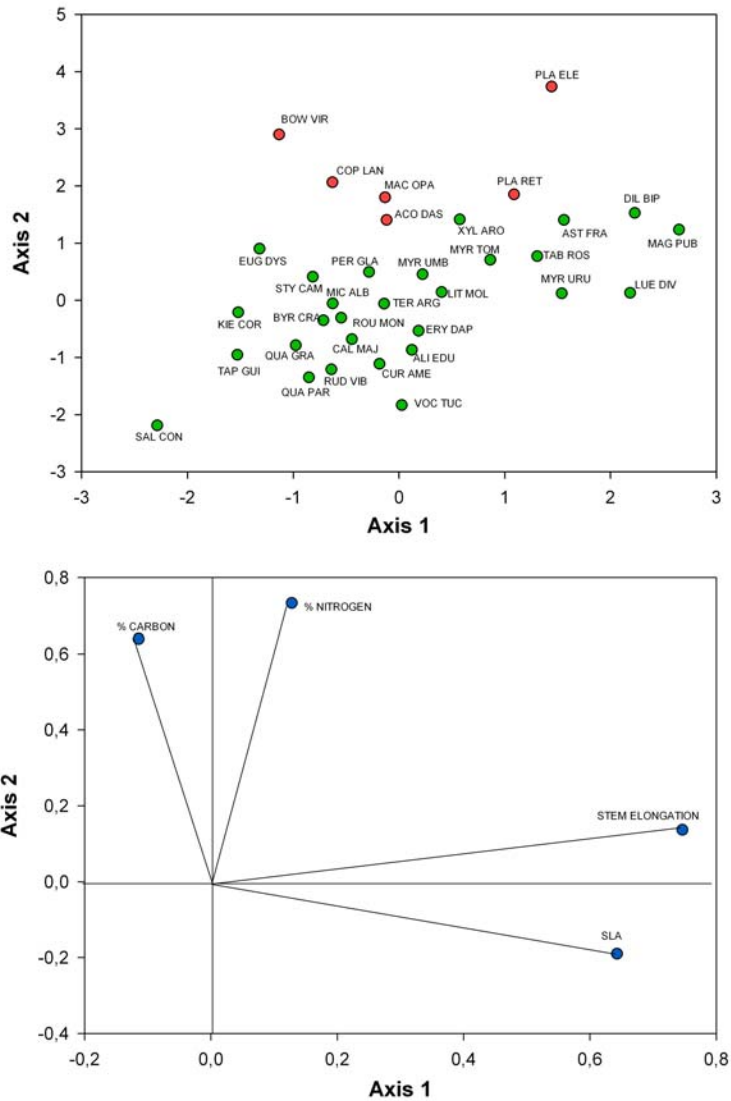


Figure 1- Canonical RLQ ordination of the dominant 34 woody species and environmental variables CEC, aluminium saturation and soil inorganic N; red dots are nitrogen-fixing species, green dots are other species. SLA – specific leaf area, elongation – maximum height to maximum diameter ratio, % nitrogen – leaf nitrogen

content (%), % carbon – leaf carbon content (%). Species codes in Appendix S1 and Appendix S2.

523

	CEC	Aluminium saturation	Inorganic nitrogen
SLA	P=0.044	P=0.044	
Hmax/Dmax	P=0.044	P=0.024	
%N			P=0.040
%C			P=0.044

524

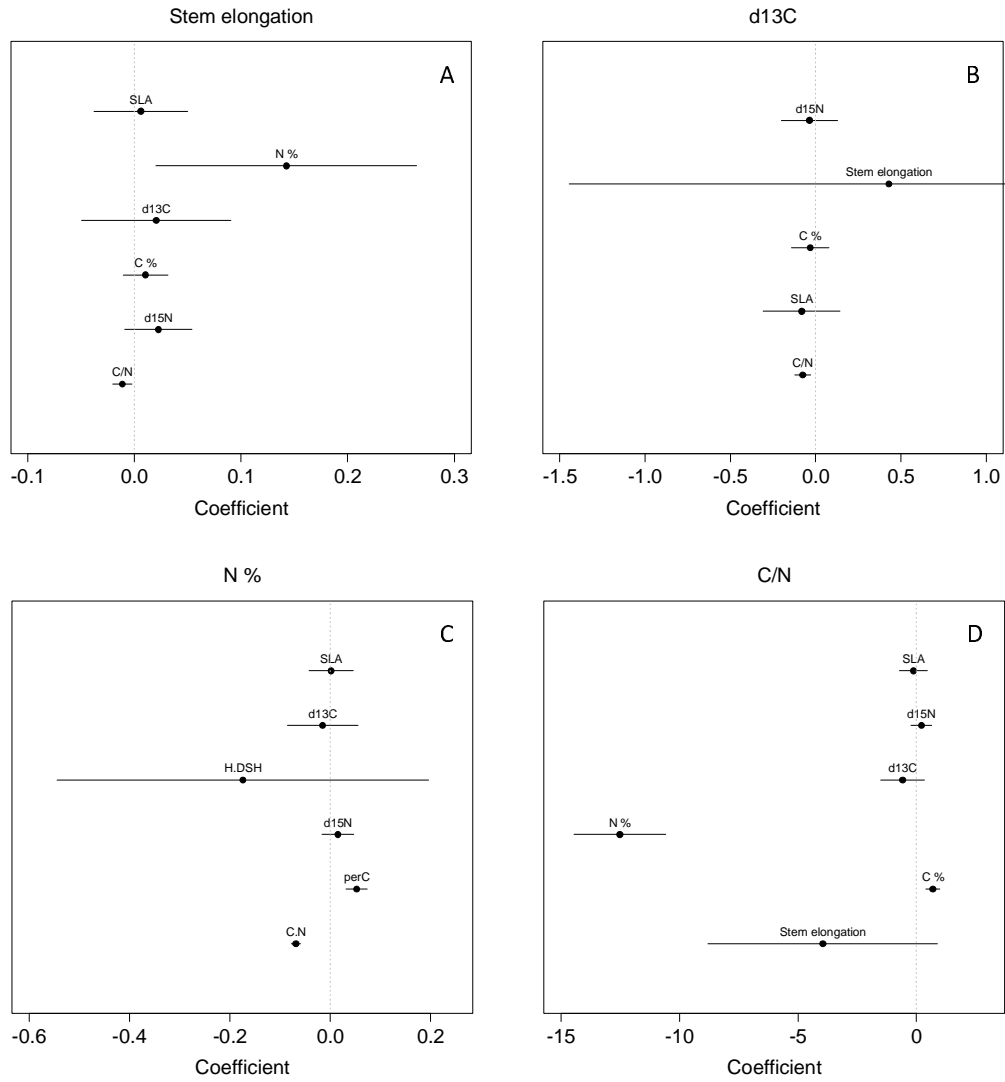
525 **Figure 2.** Results of the fourth-corner analysis. In red, P-values of positive relations between Cation

526 Exchange Capacity (CEC) and specific leaf area (SLA); between CEC and stem elongation

527 (Hmax/Dmax). In blue, P-values of negative relations between aluminium saturation (m) and specific leaf

528 area (SLA); between aluminium saturation and Hmax/Dmax (stem elongation).

529

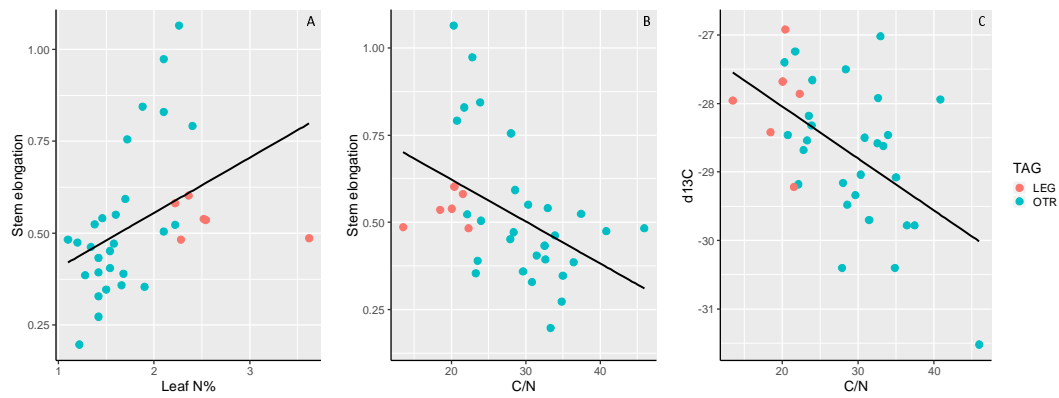


530

531 Figure 3 - Responses of functional traits of tree species to soil variation in the Cerrado. A - stem

532 elongation responses, B- $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (d13C) responses, C - leaf nitrogen (N%) responses and D - C/N

533 responses. Confidence interval = 95%.



534

535

536 **Figure 4.** Regressions of two global GLMs, the first of leaf N % and leaf C/N
537 predicting stem elongation (A and B, $p=0.0222$ and $p=0.0137$ respectively) and the
538 second of C/N predicting leaf $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ (d13C) (C, $p = 0.00134$) of the 34 Cerrado tree
539 species. Species tags: nitrogen-fixing leguminous species (LEG), other species (OTR).
540 LEG has lower C/N ($p=0.00054$) and higher Leaf N% ($p= 4.66e-06$) than OTR tested by
541 single GLMs.