

EL TRIUNFO

The El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve continues to be a BIG draw for our clients. I visited the reserve for the 13th and 14th times this decade during this past February. After the director of the fledgling eco-tourism program contacted me in the fall of 2000 I promised her that if she developed a program that exceeded the limited options available to birdwatchers at that time I would bring clients for ten years. Needless to say, she made huge improvements - cooks to prepare our meals, a local trail boss to arrange all of logistics at the base camp and on travel days, rental of the biological station with hot water [sort of] showers and mattresses for sleeping. Gone forever are the days of camping in the meadow, the long hike in from the Pacific side, and freeze-dried food.

There are now two buffer-zone communities and ten or so individuals that benefit substantially from the visits by foreign tourists/birders. This past year the reserve hired a Mexican Naturalist to guide birders into the park, and the NGO now charges management, carbon-footprint, and entrance fees to enter the protected zone. In just ten years a program developed to address the minimum level of comforts birders should have available to them now focuses on the reserve itself, its funding, and its preservation.

The program has been so successful that in each of the last eight tours at least one member of the party was returning the reserve for a second time - ³The same location, the same birds - just one more time please²! However, with the increased contact new pressures have come as well. There has been talk within the NGO of closing the program, however a more likely result will be tighter limits on the number of visitors.

On my end, as well, I have decided to take it year-to-year. If the local guides program continues its successful development a logical next step is for the reserve itself to offer open dates for direct sign-up by visitors. Though this is still in the dream-stage it will be a great day indeed when the NGO is no longer dependent on outside bird tour companies to recruit and bring their clients to the reserve.

As for now, with the reserve still working with ready-made groups only, I know that I have yet another season in me, so in early March 2011 will to return for the fifteenth time to the cloud forest home of the Horned Guan.

EASTERN LOWLANDS OF CHIAPAS STATE

I believe the best-kept secret in Mexico today is the easy access to great birding in the Caribbean lowlands of Chiapas. I have for the past six years taken parties into the Mayan ruins areas of Bonampak and Yaxchilan. There we regularly see three species of tinamous, five species of kingfishers, ten species of antbirds, and a less predictable number of exciting raptors.

I have four Custom Tours scheduled for this area during the winters of 2011 & 2012. I wish I could take everyone to this unique location; when taken as a whole -- the ruins, the river-travel, the forest trails, and the interaction with the Lacandon people - it is the perfect tour environment.

ENDEMIC BIRDS OF NORTHERN MEXICO - JUNE 18TH - 29TH, 2010

Seems that a few times each year someone's plans change as a tour draws near. Such is the case with the tour just two months away! I now have one opening [might be able to take a couple?]. You should see Thick-billed and Maroon-fronted Parrots, Worthen's Sparrow, Eared Quetzal, Tawny-collared Nightjar, Altamira Yellowthroat, Crimson Collared Grosbeak, Spotted Wren, Hooded Yellowthroat, Yellow-headed Parrot, Tamaulipas Pygmy-Owl and an additional 300 or so species. The tour runs twelve days - Beginning in Chihuahua City and ending in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon - Price: \$ 2,695. If you are interested let me know ASAP

Finally, I have just completed a Custom Tour for a party of seven birders through central Mexico. Six of those tour participants were not US citizens. I cannot thank you enough - those of you that have talked-up Legacy Tours during your birding travels - for your generous words during the past twenty years. Guiding in Mexico just keeps getting better and better ---

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