

Lacandonia: the final refuge

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Prologue to *Lacandonia: the final refuge*,
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Lacandon girls.

I am lucky enough to have known the tropical rain forests. Many precious moments of my life have been spent in them, admiring their ancient trees, gazing in awe at their abundant wildlife.

It is in rain forests such as the Lacandon rain forest that the broad concept of "biological diversity", acquires its fullest meaning. It is a term which encompasses all forms of life:

The rapid destruction of rain forests in Mexico threatens one of the most beautiful natural tropical areas in the world and the remarkable biological diversity it represents.

Lacandonia: the final refuge is a book that seeks to bring about an awareness of the devastating exploitation of the Jungle of Lacandonia.

animals, plants, and micro-organisms, the ecosystems and ecological processes from which they derive, and is usually classified as follows: a) *Genetic Diversity*, b) *Diversity of Species* and c) *Diversity of Ecosystems*.

Genetic Diversity is the sum of information contained in the genes of animals, plants and micro-organisms on our planet. Each individual of a species, as in the case of man (*Homo sapiens*), also possesses another kind of information that differentiates him from other members of that species and provides him with his individuality.

Diversity of Species refers to the diversity of living organisms, between five and ten million varieties on our planet, of which modern science recognizes only 1.4 million.

Diversity of Ecosystems refers to the variety of habitats, biological communities and ecological processes which occur in the biosphere. Ecosystems recycle nutrients, oxygen, methane and carbon in several ways and have an important effect upon the atmosphere and consequently upon climate.

Natural resources, particularly water and soil, provide the sustenance for our society, and as such require special attention.

Despite the great technological advances of modern societies, their future prosperity is by no means assured, particularly in view of the effects of economic development on ecosystems today.

The present generation is largely responsible for destroying the natural resources it inherited. The decisions we make or fail to make about how we use, protect, and restore available natural resources for

the rest of this decade will determine the future evolution of human civilization and life on Earth.

Owing to a combination of privileged geological, topographical and geographical circumstances, Mexico is endowed with enormous genetic bio-diversity as well as a great diversity of species and ecosystems. Mexico is home to the largest number of reptilian species (717), the second largest number of mammals (440) and one of the five richest collections of flora in the world (approximately 30,000 species of higher plants).

However, Mexico unfortunately leads the world in the rate at which its rain forests are being converted to use as systems of cultivation or pasture land.

With rare exceptions the systems replacing the rain forests produce very low agricultural or livestock yields, and are frequently abandoned after a few years, or degenerate into vast inefficient systems that fail to meet the economic demands of their owners. They are not only destructive to Mexico's great biological diversity, but also its fertility and capacity to retain soil and water as well.

The book reviewed here is entitled *Lacandonia: The Final Refuge* because Lacandonia is the last sizeable tropical rain forest that still



Palenque.

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survives as part of Mexico's heritage. In spite of numerous plans and programs of all kinds, the constant attack upon the region not only continues but becomes increasingly intense and uncontrollable.

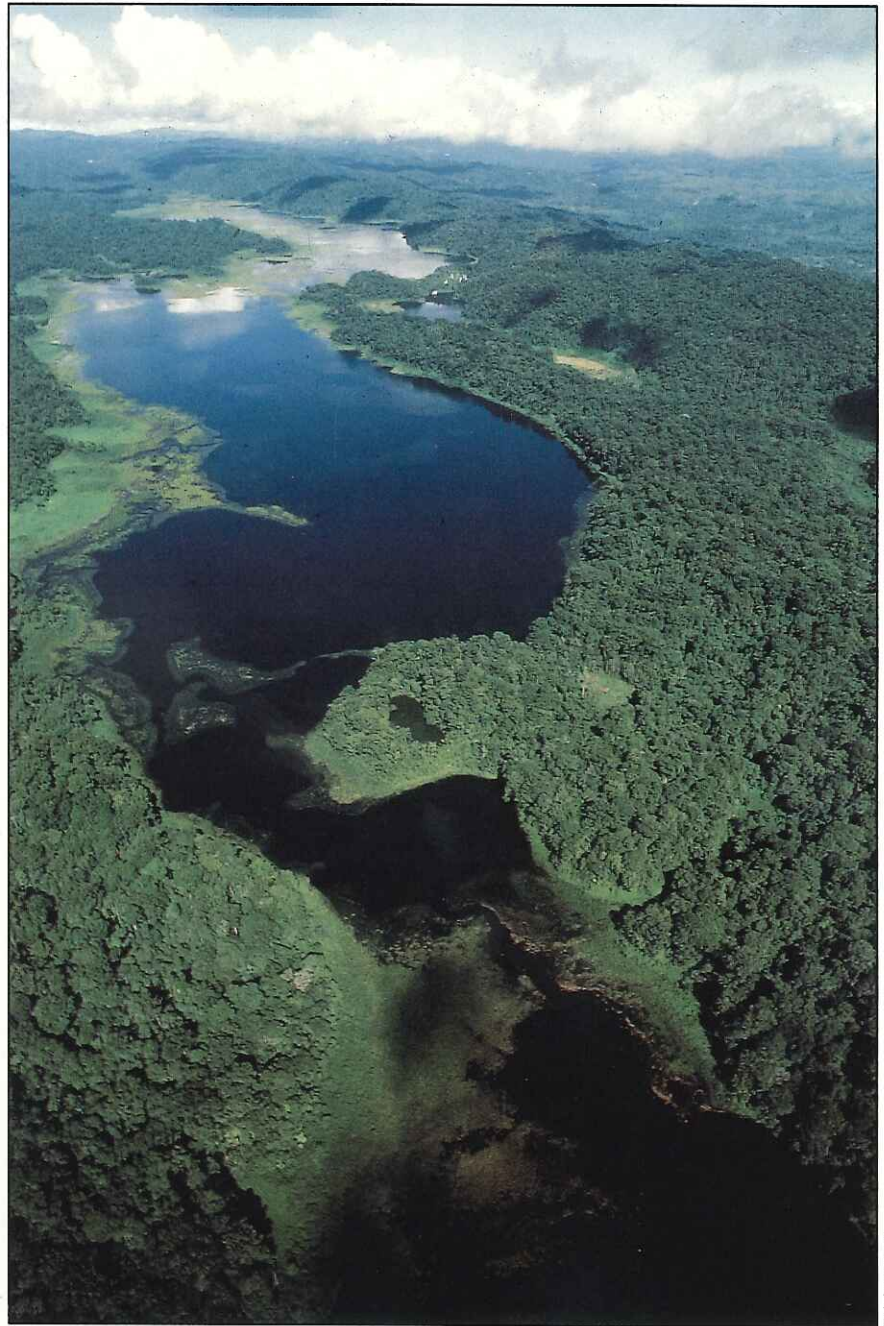
A dramatic testimony to the large scale transformation threatening the Lacandon rain forest is a photograph taken by the Landsat satellite in which the frontier between Mexico and Guatemala can be clearly traced by the destruction of rain forest in the states of Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas on the Mexican side and its preservation on the Guatemalan side. This is a clearly unacceptable situation that requires strict enforcement of severe measures to preserve and restore the Lacandon rain forest.

Lacandonia: The Final Refuge contains a description of the remarkable features of this rain forest. It emphasizes the general importance of tropical rain forests as ecosystems and depicts the unique physical attributes of this one. It describes the region's biological characteristics not only in terms of the exuberant diversity, but of the intricate



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Destruction of the rain forest.



The rain forest intact.

Fulvio Eccardi.

relationship between plants and animals and their physical environment, and the fascinating ways they interact and forge their evolutionary characteristics.

The National University of Mexico, the research institution most involved in the study of Mexico's flora, fauna and natural resources, has published this book as a dramatic

appeal for the preservation of what remains of the Lacandon rain forest and the peoples who have legitimately inhabited it for generations.

The final goal is to harness public and scientific interest in and concern for this rain forest to act responsibly and effectively to preserve this irreplaceable national heritage for succeeding generations of Mexicans ❖