

# Conserving Wildlife of the Americas: Mexico's Strategic Role

*M*exico's geography is one of the keys to understanding why it comes fourth on the list of the world's biologically "megadiverse" nations—around a dozen countries, mostly in the tropics, that harbor some 70 percent of all the world's biological diversity (ecosystems, species, and genes).

With its northern half bordering the United States, Mexico shares arid deserts, Mediterranean scrub, and temperate forests with continental North America. In the south, tropical rainforests have penetrated northwards from South America. This arises because Mexico straddles two floristic kingdoms: the Boreal (or Nearctic), which extends across North America, Europe, and Russia, and the Neotropical, centered primarily on the Amazon basin and the Andean foothills.

Between these extremes of latitude, tropical dry forests and montane cloud forests grow in climatic zones that favor unique combinations of species from both north and south. Cacti and tropical trees dominate in the former, while oaks and sweetgums shelter tree ferns, bromeliads, and epiphytic orchids in the latter.

Marine biodiversity is also extremely high, as Mexico's coastline is washed by both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans (with their particular complement of whales, sea turtles, dolphins, and fish), as well as the Caribbean Sea (where Mexico is host to the second largest coral barrier reef in the world), and the Gulf of California ("the aquarium of the world," with its unique ecology and

marine life). Deep marine trenches with thermal vent ecosystems independent of solar energy add to the enormous complexity of our biodiversity.

And it is precisely because Mexico's biodiversity is derived from this mix of elements from geographically distant regions that we are strategically placed to conserve an important share of the ecology and wildlife of the Americas. We are committed to act as a bridge in many ways.

To this end, Mexico's Environment Ministry has implemented special programs to conserve the ecology and environment of the northern states bordering the U.S., in active coordination with similar programs enacted by the U.S. government. In our southern states, the Mexican program of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor seeks to ensure that the ecological functionality of tropical ecosystems shared with Central America is conserved intact, along with the huge diversity of wildlife for which they provide a habitat.

These programs, together with our increasingly effective system of Protected Natural Areas (totaling nearly 40 million acres (16,187,480 ha) in all ecosystem types), our efforts to promote sustainable



forestry and fishing activities, and our full implementation of international agreements (such as the Ramsar Convention on wetland conservation), guarantee the conservation not only of those species unique to Mexico or resident in our country, but also migratory species from the U.S. and Central and South America that depend on refuges in Mexico for their continued survival.

The United States and Mexico are proud of a very fruitful tradition of cooperation for the conservation of ecosystems and their biodiversity, a tradition that began decades ago with migratory birds and sea turtles, long before Mexico reformed and strengthened its national institutions charged with conserving nature. In the next few years, we anticipate this cooperation will become yet broader and closer, and that our achievements will be plentiful.

The establishment of “sister” parks, the return of the California condor to the Baja Peninsula, the comeback of the Kemp’s ridley sea turtle, working across broad landscapes to conserve species of common conservation concern, expansion of our protected wetland systems, bird monitoring and capacity building—these are but a few examples of how the biodiversity of the Americas can be better conserved through collaboration now and in the near future to guarantee long-term success.

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