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## Unesco Adds Three Sites In Mexico To Its Biosphere-reserve Network

by LADB Staff

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Two imposing volcanoes overlooking Mexico City, a natural reserve in the Selva Lacandona in Chiapas, and Islas Marías just off the coast of Nayarit are among the 13 sites that the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) incorporated into its Biosphere Reserve Network this year. Biosphere reserves are protected sites that offer opportunities to test different approaches to integrated management of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, and marine resources and biodiversity. The announcement of the new sites was made at the meeting of UNESCO's International Coordination Council in Paris on May 31-June 4.

UNESCO also incorporated two other sites in Latin America, the Oxapampa-Ashaninka-Yanesha forest region in Peru and Ometepe Island in Nicaragua. Other sites are in Ethiopia, Iran, Poland, South Korea, Slovenia, Sweden, and Zimbabwe. With the designation of the new sites, Mexico now has more than 40 areas or cultural practices protected or recognized under various UNESCO programs, including the flying-dancers ritual that originated in Veracruz state, the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in central Mexico, and the agave-growing region in western Mexico (SourceMex, July 19, 2006, July 09, 2008 and October 17, 2009). UNESCO gave the biosphere-reserve designation to the volcanic chain in central Mexico, which includes the famous Iztaccíhuatl and Popocatepetl volcanoes. The latter was described as "one of the most impressive active volcanoes on the planet."

In addition, the volcanic range contains a variety of endemic, adapted species, such as the volcano rabbit. The two volcanoes are in the Izta-Popo Zoquiapan National Park. Furthermore, said UNESCO, the volcanic region which is in parts of the states of Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Morelos offers important environmental functions such as a water catchment for Mexico City, which has the highest population density in the country. "Projects for reforestation, soil rehabilitation, and groundwater infiltration are being developed to protect water supply, involving many different sectors of the population," said UNESCO. UNESCO said the Naha-Metzabok Biosphere Reserve, situated in the northern portion of the Selva Lacandona, is characterized by its geographic and humid conditions that favor development of exotic ecosystems.

The Selva Lacandona, the largest tropical forest in Mexico, is an integral part of the Mayan Forest biological corridor. The reserve is in the municipality of Ocosingo, in an area controlled by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in the 1990s (SourceMex, July 08, 1998). "The diversity of the population of more than 6,500 indigenous people including the most ancient Maya-Lacandon, as well as Tzeltales and Choles communities, adds high cultural value to the site," said UNESCO. "Agricultural and other activities practiced by indigenous communities in the buffer and transition zones contribute to sustainable development and natural resources conservation of the region."

The reserve is home to several species in danger of extinction, including the quetzal, the king vulture, and the jaguar. Islas Mariás, which houses a federal penitentiary, is home to several endemic species of plants and animals. "[The island] contains a rich diversity of ecosystems including a dry tropical forest, mangroves, swamps and coral reefs," said UNESCO. The UN agency said several government agencies are working together to support a variety of sustainable-management projects, such as reforestation and agriculture. The island is home to 54 species of endangered animals, including 19 that are endemic to the island.

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