

a visit to the

Miguel Alvarez Del Toro Zoo

by Jack Clinton-Eitnier, AFA Field Editor
McAllen, Texas

Tucked neatly inside a forest known as El Zapotal, outside a southern Mexican city of 220,000 inhabitants, is the Miguel Alvarez Del Toro Zoo, often referred to as simply the Tuxtla Zoo.

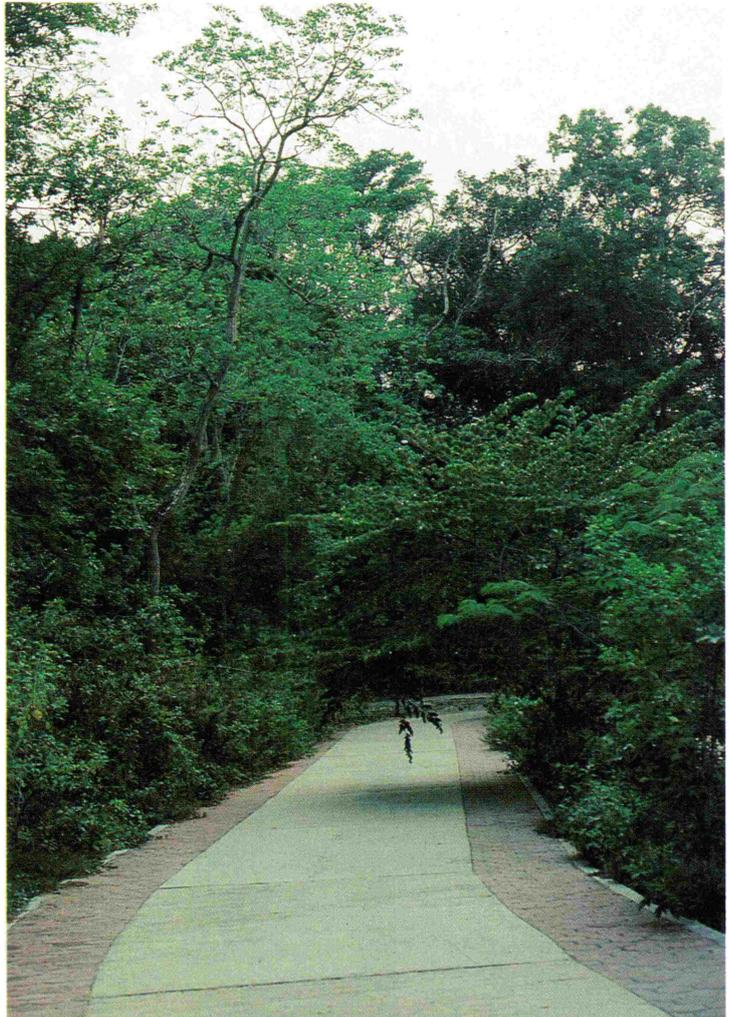
The city is Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas, Mexico. Although the city itself is only 526 meters above sea level, much greater elevations must be surmounted if one is determined to visit this famous Latin American zoo. Once you find your way to Villahermosa, Tabasco two general routes are available to Tuxtla. The southern route, although only 172 miles long, takes you past the recently active volcano El Chichon. The other route to the zoo is the Ocosingo highway through the western edge of the tropical Lacandon forest. In any event, unless you enjoy difficult mountain travel, your best route to Tuxtla is via one of the Mexican airline companies that flies regularly from Mexico City or Villahermosa.

Once at the zoo you will be impressed as to the large variety of specimens exhibited (all are native to Chiapas, Mexico). Some animals such as howler and spider monkeys and agoutis have free run of the zoo. Most, however, have very spacious enclosures tastefully planted with local plants yet affording a good view of the enclosure's inhabitants. Most mammal enclosures are of moat design with a natural creek flowing through it somewhere.

In addition to displaying most species of animals and numerous birds native to the state, the founder's lifelong dedication to conservation is most obvious. Throughout the zoo numerous signs state various messages like, "Please turn off your radio and listen to nature," and "No one has the right to take a life that he has not created (Mahatma Gandhi)."

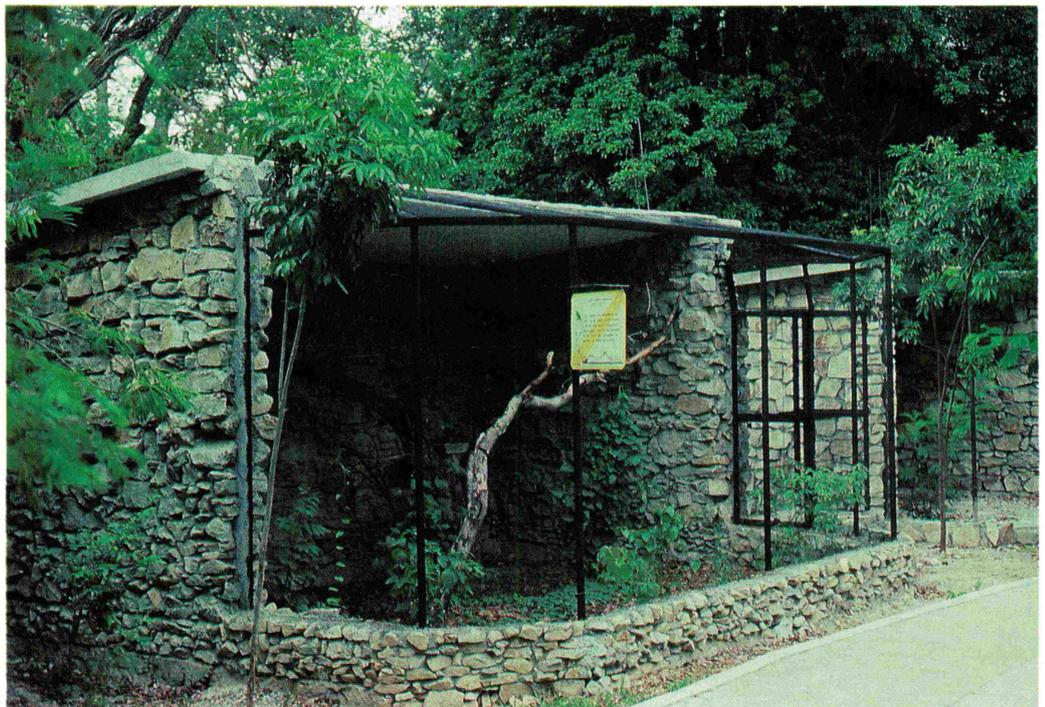
After a trip through the tropical Lacandon forest, the view of harpy eagles, horned guans and Muscovy ducks is most moving. For anyone who shares his concern for the future of neotropical avifauna, I encourage you to make your way to the Miguel Alvarez Del Toro Zoo in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, Mexico. ●

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In contrast to the neat, "just groomed" look of most North American zoos, the Miguel Alvarez Del Toro Zoo gives one the feeling that you are walking through a tropical rainforest. Despite the dense vegetation and the closeness to a major city, the zoo was very neat and clean.

Typical psittacine enclosure.



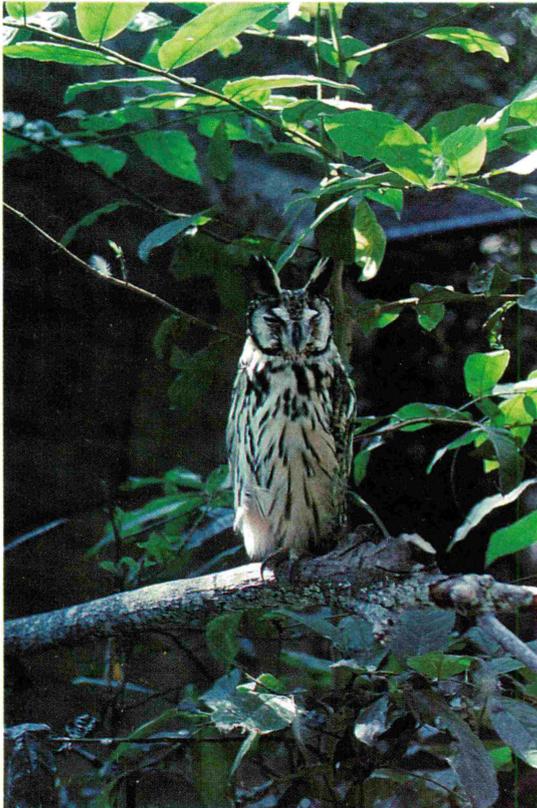


The ocellated turkey (Agriocharis ocellata) is one of many of Chiapas' endangered species on display.



Without a doubt the most impressive of all its inhabitants was the horned guan (Oreophasis derbianus).

Of the four species of owls on exhibit, the striped owl (Rhinoptynx clamator) was one of the most striking.



A rare Central American cracid, the highland guan (Penelopina nigra) is often called the black chachalaca. It is, however, not a true chachalaca.

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