References

General Guides

Numerous guidebooks address the logistics of travel to what has become one of the Western Hemisphere's major tourist destinations. All provide some basic background on the archaeological sites buried among recommendations for lodging, dining, and experiencing the apparently abundant nightlife. All are totally devoid of any meaningful discussions of the region's natural resources (except those that have themselves been converted to tourist destinations). Two guides that we found particularly useful, primarily because they went farther beyond the mundane than most of the alternatives, were: *Yucatán* (Lonely Planet) by Ben Greensfelder and *Hidden Cancún & the Yucatán* by Richard Harris.

Reptiles and Amphibians

The Amphibians and Reptiles of the Yucatan Peninsula by Julian C. Lee. Phenomenally comprehensive, a reference rather than a guide. Highly recommended, but expensive and not for carrying into the field.

A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of the Maya World: The Lowlands of Mexico, Northern Guatemala, and Belize by Julian C. Lee. A field guide based on the more authoritative coffee table book by the same author. Highly recommended.

Amphibians and Reptiles of Northern Guatemala, the Yucatán, and Belize by Jonathan A. Campbell. A nice guide enlivened by tales of the author's personal experiences in the region. Recommended.

Reptiles of Central America by Gunther Köhler. Nicely illustrated, but broader coverage than the other books listed results in less detail than in the other recommended guides. Recommended, but expensive.

Birds

A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America by Steven N. G. Howell and Sophie Webb. The most comprehensive guide to the region, but large and heavy. Highly recommended.

Birder's Mexico (Louise Lindsey Merrick Natural Environment Series, 12) by Roland H. Wauer. Not so much a traditional guide as an introduction to birding in México; definitely nice to have and great for preparation prior to a trip. Recommended.

A Field Guide to Mexican Birds: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador (Peterson Field Guides) by Roger Tory Peterson (Series Editor) and Edward L. Chalif. Not up to the standards of the Peterson Field Guides for the U.S. and useful only with both U.S. guides in hand. Definitely a third choice among those listed.

Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas: Belize, Guatemala, and El Salvador by Ernest Preston Edwards and Edward Murrell Butler (illustrator). Nice pictures, but disorganized and difficult to use. Not recommended.

SPECIES PROFILE

Blunt-headed Tree Snake *Imantodes cenchoa*

Snakes in the genus *Imantodes* are among several Central American species to effectively exploit arboreal prey. Like many other species that spend most of their lives in vegetation, these snakes are very slender and elongate and have very long tails. Compressing their sides and forming their bodies into a semblance of an I-beam, they can span remarkable distances as they move from branch to branch. Although they can and do occasionally venture onto the ground, most individuals probably never leave the trees and bushes on which they're usually encountered. Active at dusk and well into the night, these snakes take refuge during the day, occasionally hiding in bromeliads or other epiphytic vegetation.

As do many Neotropical snakes in the Family Colubridae (which includes most common snakes throughout the world), Blunt-headed Tree Snakes have enlarged, grooved teeth near the back of each upper jaw with which they can inject venom. However, the location of the fangs renders the delivery of venom difficult unless the prey item has been taken well into the mouth. Also, the venom appears to be most effective on their usual prey of lizards and frogs. They are not dangerous to humans and very rarely bite, even when handled.

Unlike Vine Snakes in the genus *Oxybelis*, which fill a comparable arboreal, lizard- and frog-eating niche during the daytime, *Imantodes cenchoa* has a vertically elliptical pupil that allows for considerable enlargement in order to trap sparse light at night. Like most snakes, however, Blunt-headed Tree Snakes rely primarily on chemical cues to find lizards sleeping on branches and leaves, nocturnally active frogs, clutches of frog eggs suspended over water, or lizard and snake eggs hidden under bark or in nooks and crannies above the ground. Their blunt heads allow them to consume larger prey than their slender bodies would seem to be able to accommodate.

The long slender bodies of Blunt-headed Tree Snakes (*Imantodes cenchoa*) allow them to span considerable distance as they move from branch to branch.