

Meleagris Ocellata,
Ocellated Turkey



Josefina Sequen, Nov.20,2014

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Notes on the ocellated turkey of Guatemala, *Meleagris ocellata*

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Since this is “Thanksgiving Week” in much of North America, and since the ocellated turkey is one of the more beautiful birds of Guatemala, we at FLAAR Reports have spent the time making an introductory bibliography on this species.

This bird is renowned for being difficult if not impossible to raise in captivity. The Quetzal is the bird of freedom for the same reason: the Quetzal wants to be free (out in its natural environment). The difference is that the ocellated turkey evidently stays alive in captivity, but mainly does not breed in captivity, and the young do not thrive (or sometimes don’t even survive). But it would be worth experimenting to see if these birds were allowed to roam around their natural habitat they would indeed reproduce more. In other words, if in their natural environment, instead of in Florida or elsewhere, which is not their natural home eco-system.

For example, the scarlet macaws of Copan Ruinas, Honduras, are totally free to fly anywhere. Their wings are not clipped. But these birds return each night to their keepers so at night they are safe. My suggestion is to work out this system for the ocellated turkey: let them roam during the day, but try to have a protected area for them to overnight. I would really enjoy working on a program to introduce the ocellated turkey to AutoSafari Chapin. Perhaps experiment with several breeding pairs and see if they can multiply. Visitors love the macaws and peccary and spider monkeys. I would really enjoy seeing the Guatemalan turkey strutting around also.

One other reason I am interested in the turkey of the Maya area is that some scholars think the tail feathers of this bird were the inspiration for certain motifs among the Maya of Tikal, precisely on the numerous plates of the Tomb of the Jade Jaguar, the burial I discovered at Tikal while a Harvard student working for the University of Pennsylvania at Tikal in 1965. My several-hundred page undergraduate honor’s thesis is available as a download on our www.maya-archaeology.org (Burial 196, Str. 5D-73, a pyramid facing the south side of Temple II; Str. 5D-73 was identical in design to Temple I but had no masonry temple on top; Str. 5D-73 was just a burial pyramid; it’s temple would have been wooden with a thatch roof, as clearly shown in many graffiti at Tikal and Comalcalco (Tabasco) and other Maya sites).

I estimate that the ocellated turkey could be fostered in Las Guacamayas area (though there are plenty of local people who would tend to hunt such a tasty species). But with proper education, and a balance (a few birds for the dinner table as long as the majority of the birds are left free to wander around), I believe the ocellated turkey could be added as a species to attract biologists to Las Guacamayas. In the Monterrico area local people are allowed to harvest and eat marine turtle eggs as long as a percent are saved to reproduce.

I would enjoy working with more nature parks in Guatemala to have more groups of ocellated turkeys, not in cages, but free to roam in fields (such as the white-tailed deer at AutoSafari

Chapin). Obviously more a challenge since the turkeys can easily fly over any fence. But... if the turkeys are happy in one area of the park, enough will stay there to entertain the visitors.

In the meantime, here is an introductory bibliography on the ocellated turkey of Guatemala.

Credit:

The drawing is by Kakchiquel Mayan student intern Josefina. Our goal is to have “family friendly” style, as we wish to create books for children so they can understand to protect each species and their needed eco-system. It would be great to have these books sponsored and in Q’eqchi’ Mayan plus the other languages of the natural area of these turkeys (Peten Ytza Maya, Mopan, etc).

Meleagris ocellata, ocellated turkey

BRANTON, Scott, and Ray BERRYHILL

2007 Pavo! Pavo The Odyssey of Ocellated Turkey Hunting. Mississippi State, Miss. Branton Berryhill Publishers.

DICKSON, James, G.

1992 The Wild Turkey: Biology and Management. National Wild Turkey Federation (U.S.), United States. Forest Service. Stackpole Books.

GAUMER, G.

1881 Notes on *Meleagris ocellata*, Cuvier. Transactions of the Annual Meetings of the Kansas Academy of Science, 8: 60-62.

GONZALEZ, Maria Jose., QUIGLEY, Howard B. and I. Curtis TAYLOR

1996 Habitat use, reproductive behaviour, and survival of Ocellated Turkeys in Tikal National Park. In: Dickson, J. G. (editor), Proceedings of the Seventh National Wild Turkey Symposium, pages 193-199. National Wild Turkey Federation, Mechanicsburg, PA.

GONZALEZ, Maria Jose., QUIGLEY, Howard B. and I. Curtis TAYLOR

1998 Habitat Use and Reproductive Ecology of the Ocellated Turkey in Tikal National Park, Guatemala. The Wilson Bulletin, Vol. 110, No. 4 (Dec., 1998), pp. 505-510.

HEINRICHS, Christine

2010 Ocellated Turkeys Southern Cousins of the USA’s Wild Turkeys. Backyard Poultry. October/November 2010, pages 50-51.

www.BackyardPoultryMag.com

<http://sej2008.typepad.com/files/ocellated-turkeys-ads-removed.pdf>

KAMPICHLER, Christian, CALMÉ, Sophie, WEISSENBERGER, Holger, and Stefan Louis ARRIAGA-Weiss

2010 Indication of a species in an extinction vortex: The ocellated turkey on the Yucatan peninsula, Mexico. Acta Oecologica, Volume 36, Issue 6, November–December 2010, Pages 561–568.

McROBERTS, Jon

Ecology of ocellated turkey in Mexico

This dissertation is mentioned in over a dozen web sites, but we have not found a completed version anywhere (at least not yet). So we do not yet have a date for it.

MILLER, B. W. and C. M. MILLER

1997 Avian risk assessment: bird species of conservation concern (Belize).

ROBERTS, M. C., JON T., Rich, RODRÍGUEZ, Flores, C., SOBERANES González C., and M. C. ARIZ-MENDI

2012 Ocellated Turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*), Neotropical Birds Online (T. S. Schulenberg, Editor). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; retrieved from Neotropical Birds Online: http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=83431

SUGIHARA, G. and K. HESTON

1981 Field Notes on Winter Flocks of the Ocellated Turkey (*Agriocharis ocellata*). *The Auk*, 98/2: 396-398.

Note: what they call *Agriocharis ocellata* is now called *Meleagris ocellata*.

TAYLOR, Curtis, I., QUIGLEY, Howard B. and Maria J. GONZALEZ

2002 Ocellated Turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*). NWTF Wildlife Bulletin No. 6, National Wild Turkey Foundation.

Available on-line.

An informative article, clearly based on lots of good field work. Unfortunately the photos are either scanned film or low-res digital. Since this project was circa 1993, high-resolution digital cameras were not readily available. When you scan 35mm film, unless you have a sophisticated professional scanner you end up with results as seen in this report, especially if the original images were taken without a tripod and without automatic focus to begin with. Also, color balance is not precise (each photo has a different color balance, which is a polite way of saying that the published color is not accurate). Although the research results are timeless, it would help to re-do the photography with modern digital equipment and especially with color balance.

Web site of NWTF is www.nwtf.org

TOZZER, Alfred, M. and Glover M. ALLEN

1910 Animal Figures in the Maya Codices. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

WEYER, D.

1983 The other wild turkey. *AFA Watchbird* 10: 26-29.

Bibliography

Web sites worth looking at to see images of ocellated turkey

www.arkive.org/ocellated-turkey/meleagris-ocellata/

ARKive, Images and movies of the ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*)

www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=305

BirdLife International (2014) Species factsheet: *Meleagris ocellata*.

http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/lifehistory?p_p_spp=83431

Useful information, though similar to that of Wikipedia.

www.semarnat.gob.mx/Pages/inicio.aspx

www.thefeaturedcreature.com/not-your-average-turkey-ocellated/

These are professional quality photographs, harvested from diverse sources.

<http://travel.mongabay.com/topics/new/ocellated%20turkey1.html>

A dozen photographs of the ocellated turkey in its natural habitat.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ocellated_turkey

Books on birds of a country or area of a country, which should show the ocellated turkey in this specific area.

ALVAREZ del Toro, Miguel

1971 *Las Aves de Chiapas*. 2nd edition. Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas (UNACH). 272 pages.

BEAVERS, Randell A.

1992 *The Birds of Tikal: An Annotated Checklist for Tikal National Park and Peten, Guatemala*. Texas A&M University Press. 153 pages.

BELETSKY, Les

2006 *Southern Mexico: The Cancun Region, Yucatan Peninsula, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Tabasco*. Travellers' Wildlife Guides, Interlink Pub Group. 487 pages

BELETSKY, Les

2010 *Belize & Northern Guatemala*. Travellers' Wildlife Guides. Interlink Books. 477 pages.

CEBALLOS, Gerardo, et al.

2009 *Fauna Mexicana: Esplendor de la Naturaleza*. Telmex. 303 pages.

Photo album; not a book with technical information, but most of the photos are outstanding. Covers hundreds of species of fauna, so not many photos of scarlet macaws but the overall book has awesome photographs.

CRUZ, Pacheco

1958 Diccionario de la fauna yucateca. Merida. 379 pages.

L. DAVIS, Irby

1972 A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Central America. University of Texas Press. 264 pages.

PRESTON, Edwards, Ernest and Edward MURRELL Butler

1998 A Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Adjacent Areas: Belize, Guatemala, and El Salvador, Third Edition. University of Texas Press. 292 pages.

EISERMANN, Knut and Claudia AVENDAÑO

2006 Diversidad de aves en Guatemala, con una lista bibliográfica. E. Cano (Ed.) Biodiversidad de Guatemala, Vol. 1. Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, Guatemala. Pp. 525-623

On Guatemala alone they have found more than 1200 publications on the birds of Guatemala.

EISERMANN, Knut and Claudia AVENDAÑO

2007 Lista Comentada de las Aves de Guatemala/Annotated checklist of the birds of Guatemala. Lynx Edicions. 175 pages.

FRENZ, Bert

2012 A Birders Guide to Belize. Perfect Paperback. American Birding Association. 374 pages.

HORWICH, Robert and Jon LYON

1990 A Belizean Rain Forest: The Community Baboon Sanctuary. 3rd edition, Orang-utan Press. 420 pages.

HOWELL, Steve N. G. and Sophie WEBB

1995 A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America. Oxford University Press. 1010 pages.

I do not yet have this book (but I am trying to get it). Amazon says it has 1010 pages which is entirely unlikely, but at over 850 pages (that Google Books reveal) this is the largest book on this subject in this area for the last 30 years (that I know of). Most books on birds are meant to be portable handbooks (hence tend to not be very long).

JONES, Lee H.

2004 Birds of Belize. Corrie Herring Hooks Series, University of Texas Press. 317 pages.

KRICHER, John

1999 A Neotropical Companion. Princeton University Press. 451 pages.

LAND, Hugh C.

1970 Birds of Guatemala. Harrowood Books.

MARTINEZ G., Milton

2013 Aves de Guatemala: Birds of Guatemala (El Quetzal, Trogones y Colibres) (Volume 1). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 116 pages.

MYSKA, Petr

2007 Viva Natura: Field Guide to the Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds and Mammals. Viva Natura. 248 pages.

PETERSON, Tory Roger

1999 A Field Guide to Mexican Birds: Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador (Peterson Field Guides). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 320 pages.

SCHLESINGER, Victoria

2001 Animals and Plants of the Ancient Maya: A Guide. University of Texas Press. 351 pages.

Excellent drawings but noticeably weak on knowledge of which plants and animals were really part of Ancient Maya life and beliefs. The book is well intentioned, but, for a university press, especially a university such as Texas at Austin which has such a decades-long track record in quality university research, this book is a disappointment. However for some animals, the coverage is acceptable, so the author does cover the scarlet macaw acceptably.

Also the black-and-white line drawings are of better-than-average quality: fully professional drawings. And the creatures she does cover are a good start. But a student (and any iconographer, epigrapher, ethnobotanist, or ethnozoologist) needs more than the incomplete number of species of the Maya civilization.

SIBLEY, D. A.

2000 The Sibley guide to birds. Knopf. National Audubon Society, New York. 545 pages.

This covers birds of North America, but is helpful for Guatemala because many birds of North America migrate to Central America.

SMITHE, Frank B. and R. A. PAYNTER

1963 Birds of Tikal, Guatemala, 1963, Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College, Volume 128, Number 5 : with 1 plate. pages 245-324

SMITHE, Frank B.

1966 The Birds of Tikal. Natural History Press. 350 pages.

VAN Perlo, Ber

2006 Birds of Mexico and Central America. Princeton University Press. 336 pages.

WHEATLEY, Nigel and David BREWER

2002 Where to Watch Birds in Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Princeton Field Guides, Princeton University Press. 448 pages.

Web sites on birds of a part of Mesoamerica

www.belizeaudubon.org/birds/birds-of-belize.html

www.birdlist.org/belize.htm

www.birdlist.org/el_salvador.htm

www.birdlist.org/guatemala.htm

www.birdlist.org/honduras.htm

www.cayaya-birding.com

Good for birds of Guatemala.