

Short Communications



Recent sightings of Common Raven *Corvus corax* in the highlands of Guatemala

Common Raven *Corvus corax* is widely distributed across North America, Eurasia and North Africa² in all terrestrial biomes, except tropical rainforests³. Nicaragua marks the southern edge of the species' range in the Americas⁸. Its diet includes arthropods, seeds, grain and carrion, with reports that it also feeds on agricultural crops³. In dpto. Huehuetenango, Guatemala, local people suggest that the species feeds on young chickens and domestic turkeys¹. The species is also mentioned in the sacred Mayan book *Popol Wuj*, in which it is named 'Guardian of Maize'⁹. Common Raven is rare in Guatemala and its presence is not well documented. I report here recent observations, more than 50 years after the last documented records.

Records in Guatemala

Historic records of the species in Guatemala are from arid habitat in Usumatlán, dpto. Zacapa, at 1,150 m, where it was common >50 years ago⁹. These observations represent the species' lowest elevation in Guatemala. In 1962, Baepler¹ reported ravens in the Soloma region, dpto. Huehuetenango, 20 km north of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, at 1,280–3,505 m. Thereafter, there are two records available online at eBird⁶: one, between Totonicapán and Sololá at 3,015 m, in 2002 (J. Berry) and six near San Pedro La Laguna, dpto. Sololá, in 2007 (C. Anderson).

According to Villar-Anléu⁹, the high plateau of Todos Santos Cuchumatán is the most important locality for Common Raven in the country. The species is currently included in the national list of threatened species⁵ and



Figure 1. Common Raven *Corvus corax*, Laguna Ordóñez, Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Guatemala, January 2015 (Pablo Rafael Bolaños Sittler)

its population is apparently declining, possibly due to anthropogenic activity⁹. According to local habitants of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Common Raven was formerly regular around populated areas, and they attribute the current decline to the use of chemicals on crops (E. Matías & B. Godínez pers. comm.).

In 2005, I saw several individuals in Todos Santos Cuchumatán Protected Area, which covers 7,255 ha⁴. More recent records of *C. corax* were obtained in the same conservation unit, at Laguna Ordóñez, at 3,685 m. Vocalisations were recorded using a programmable autonomous recorder model SM-III of Wildlife Acoustics, Inc. (Maynard, MA), configured to record for one minute every ten minutes over 24 hours, at a sampling rate of 48 kHz and 16-bit. It was installed for five consecutive days (18–22 January 2015), obtaining records of *C. corax* on every one (cf. www.xeno-canto.org/235408, www.xeno-canto.org/235407), providing the first documented records of *C. corax* in Guatemala since the work of Baepler¹ and Land⁷. The most abundant tree species in the area is *Pinus hartwegii* and in the lower canopy *Juniperus standleyi*⁴. On 18 January 2015, I saw a Common Raven perched in a pine at 15°30'3.24"N 91°31'57.36"W,

10 m above ground, near an unpaved road at 3,720 m. Later the same day, I observed five in flight and perched on pine trees, between 16h15 and 18h00, at Laguna Ordóñez (15°30'39.36"N 91°33'4.28"W), at 3,685 m. They vocalised frequently. On 19 January 2015, one was vocalising at Laguna Ordóñez at 06h00 and between 06h00 and 13h00 at least eight were vocalising, flying at least eight were vocalising, flying and perching on pines, mostly alone (Fig. 1) or in pairs, but once eight were seen together.

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by the collaboration of Esteban Matías, forest ranger of Todos Santos Cuchumatán Protected Area. Thanks to Margarita Vides for her review of the text. The work was supported by UNDP, with finance from GEF and in collaboration with the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP), as part of the project 'Ecotourism promotion to strengthen the financial sustainability of the Guatemalan system of protected areas – SIGAP', 81367.

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Received 19 August 2015; final
revision accepted 14 January 2016