

# The Forest of El Jaguar

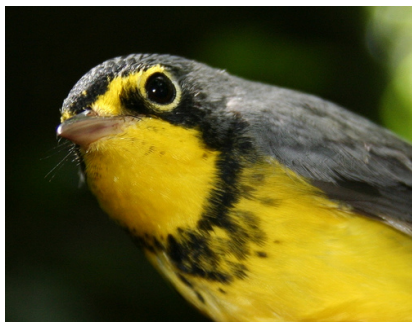
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High in the Isabelia Mountain Range in northern Nicaragua, there is a tropical cloud forest whose giant oak and fern trees date back to Jurassic times. These ancient trees provide shelter for a multitude of rare and exotic wildlife, including golden-winged warblers, pumas, and mountain lions. As **World Migratory Bird Day** approaches this weekend, we are celebrating this bountiful region as a haven for thousands of migratory birds that arrive each winter to escape colder northern climates.

Twenty years ago, as forests in the region were being destroyed to be replaced by coffee plantations, two people decided to save this important region. Lili Chavarría, an avid bird lover and ornithologist, and her husband Georges Duriaux, an organic coffee farmer, bought the 260-acre (120-hectare) tract of land from Lili's brother and named it the El Jaguar Private Wildlife Reserve and Organic Farm. Their vision was to create a model of sustainability based on three principles: environmental protection, sustainable production, and social responsibility.



Today, they welcome tourists and researchers to stay at their **Rainforest Alliance Verified ecolodge** and experience the beautiful flora and fauna that abounds in El Jaguar. Visitors have a choice of staying in one of the two-bedroom cabins or one-bedroom bungalows, or in the biological station with bunk beds. All of the accommodations have hot water and are powered by solar energy.

Visitors can see take tours of Georges and Lili's family-run sustainable coffee farm that produces high quality coffee using environmentally-friendly methods that enhances habitat for wildlife. You'll be able to check out the trees that coffee beans come from--they might look different

than you'd expect! Their farm has been certified for sustainability by the Rainforest Alliance and their product was the first coffee selected by Whole Foods Market to receive the Authentic Food Artisan seal. The farm was also designated an "Important Bird Area" by the bird conservation organization **BirdLife International**.

El Jaguar is home to an abundance of biodiversity, including hundreds of birds, mammals, butterflies, orchids, bromeliads, and dragonflies. Researchers have catalogued all of the species they've come across in El Jaguar - which includes 285 bird species alone -- and the **entire list** is available on El Jaguar's website. The sheer size of the list gives you an idea of what a biologically rich area this really is! The nearby Lake Apanás is also a wonderful location for bird watching and boat tours.

For a cultural experience, travelers can visit the workshops of the black pottery artisans in Las Cureñas or make the 10-mile hike the picturesque town of San Rafael del Norte.



Georges and Lili were honored by the Rainforest Alliance as **stewards of the forest** for their work actively safeguarding the "lungs of our planet."

"We realized that in order to conserve our land, we needed to earn income from it," explains Georges. "I had experience with organic coffee production... [and] my wife is fascinated by ornithology and has always been a nature lover. So everything fell into place."