

Being a part of the **Lake Chapala** society, I have come to realize that biodiversity is crucial to the survival of plants, animals and human beings. Reading Th  
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### *Tapir's Morning Bath*

convinced me of this beyond the shadow of a doubt. Elizabeth Royte spent most of a year in a cloud forest on an island in Lake Gatun formed by damming the river to create the

### **Panama Canal**

locks. Since

1926

a science laboratory there has attracted ecologists and nature biologists from all over the world. The title refers to the enigma of a small pond meticulously measured several times a day by a scientist who wanted to account for every fluctuation of the water level. Mysteriously, at 6:00 in the morning the water level rose, and shortly thereafter it returned to what it had been earlier. Finally the scientist discovered that a tapir, a large rhino-like animal, bathed there.

Here to the windward of lake Chapala, a fragile and **threatened lake**, I sit in a **small patch** of shade and read of the many unsolved riddles of ecology, like why a species becomes extinct, or which plants, animals and insects are symbiotic and how. Especially fascinating to me is the **diversity**

gradient, which means that the closer to the equator you get, the greater are the numbers of species of plants, animals and insects. We in the Lake Chapala society, know that our lake is 22 degrees

### **north latitude**

, and the bio-diversity here never ceases to fill me with wonder.

I can almost, but not quite, forget that unless, we who live near the lake take immediate action, it will die. I can forget it because water is plentiful here. The wells in San Martin are fed from a plentiful underground stream that is so near the surface that some of the lots near us support large native trees. That **underground river** is what remains of the dead lakes near Zacoalco and Sayula. Eons ago Zapotitan, Jocotepec, San Martin, Zacoalco and Sayula Valleys were part of an interconnected series of lakes.

We do not take water **for granted** here. We catch the water from the washing machine and haul it to the lower garden. Gray water runs directly into the garden. I wish I could say that I was motivated only by virtue, but the truth is, I am motivated by thrift. This part of the Lake Chapala society buys water for water tanks because there are no electric lines in this part of

### **San Martin**

yet. No electricity means no pump for the well. The

## Biodiversity - An Important Concern for the Lake Chapala Society

Written by Cat Gonzales

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*campesinos*

who pasture cattle here walk many kilometers to water their animals at the troughs near the other well. They have meetings about collecting enough money to run electricity from the nearby transformer to our well, dug in 2002. They talk also of the empty promises of the PRI mayor of Jocotepec to buy a pump and share in the expense of running electricity to the lots that are officially part of the city. In these meetings, which few women attend, they talk of the forthcoming elections. Nati and I look at each other and shrug; we've heard

**empty promises**

before.

I would have loved to be here during the times Nati remembers, when **maidens** bathed in the lake in their white shifts while their suitors politely turned their heads. I see this scene in paintings and in my mind's eye. What would the Lake Chapala society be like today, if we had this now, as we did then?

When I continue to read in the shade of my ponciana trees, I am surprised at how little scientists know about how the creatures on this island help to preserve the habitat, and why one species of tree evolved so similarly to others that it's difficult to tell them apart. Other questions remain, such as how many more medicines might be discovered from plants in the rain and cloud forests, which, like our lake, are diminishing every decade.

I become *nostalgic* for the passing of certain pleasures of a fuller lake. I miss the boats and the myriad

cheap fish restaurants

serving

*mojarra*

and white fish and tacos of caviar. May I continue to re-use wash water and bath water, even when there will be electricity here, probably within the coming year. May we as visitors in Mexico be stewards of the land and the lake. What we do today affects the lives of many other creatures, some of which will be here long after we as a species have passed from the scene. We as the Lake Chapala society, need to be aware that our biodiversity is changing and we need to protect it.

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