

Flowers of Orchids on Trees

surrounding the Maya Ruins of Yaxha, PNYNN

Vol 15 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo (PNYNN)

Reserva de la Biosfera Maya RBM Peten, Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth

October 2025



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Introduction

Orchid Flowers of Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

I first learned about orchids of Peten when Hal Ball and his wife Alberta came to visit Yaxha in the early 1970's. She was a member of an orchid society. They both told me "don't just scan the ground with your eyes looking for house mounds...raise your eyes up and look at all the epiphytes in the trees above you." While hiking back-and-forth to El Mirador many decades ago, I saw the tiny miniature orchid flowers that bloom in the bajos that you hike through. In following years I learned about orchid botanist Fredy Archila and he kindly let me photograph orchids in his impressive collection in Coban, Alta Verapaz.

Then during my return to PNYNN to study flora and fauna 2018-2019, we began to notice aquatic orchids. We have separate FLAAR Reports on these amazing *Bletia purpurea* flowers. There are two species of aquatic orchids: *Bletia purpurea* that floats on tule-like plants about 2 meters from the shore, and a second one, *Habenaria repens*, that grows in seasonally inundated shores—so far, the only one we found was adjacent to the "ring of water around most savannas" of the Savanna of 3 Fern Species. On June 4th, 2019, the buds were present but no flowers had opened yet, so we don't yet have a full FLAAR Reports on *Habenaria repens*.

There are several species of wild vanilla orchid vines in the Maya Highlands and Maya Lowlands. Fredy Archila has documented lots of them (Google Fredy Archila vanilla orchid). During dozens of field trips between Yaxha and Nakum we found scores of vines of these wild vanilla orchids—but to identify their species we needed flowers. We searched and searched and so did plant scout Teco (Moises Daniel Perez Diaz). But a year or so ago, while driving to Nakum, one of the team wanted to photograph an ocellated turkey, so he followed the turkey into the bajo vegetation—and—found a FLOWERING wild vanilla orchid. Probably the first every photographed in the entire PNYNN (Hellmuth 2022).

The present FLAAR Reports shows all the photos of wild orchids that we have found while hiking throughout PNYNN looking for flowering plants. Obviously, there are dozens, scores of more orchids that we have not yet spotted—but at least we show a good corpus of the few species that we have noted so far.

Chapter 1

Encyclia radiata (LIndl.) Dressler. is now Synonym for the new accepted name Epidendrum radiatum Lindl.

Veliz, Mijangos and Fialko (2010) show a very nice photo of this orchid flower on their page 9.

Their helpful photos are from Naranjo-Sa'al area of PNYNN. Since Fialko and her team lived in the camp there and worked for weeks, months, years in the plazas and acropolises and surroundings, they had much more opportunities to find lots and lots of different species or orchids; plus they had good outside funding.

Our photos show more of the whole plant plus list the date we saw this flower in full bloom, namely Oct. 7, 2018. The photos on the following page are from Oct. 8, 2018, from a different plaza at Yaxha.



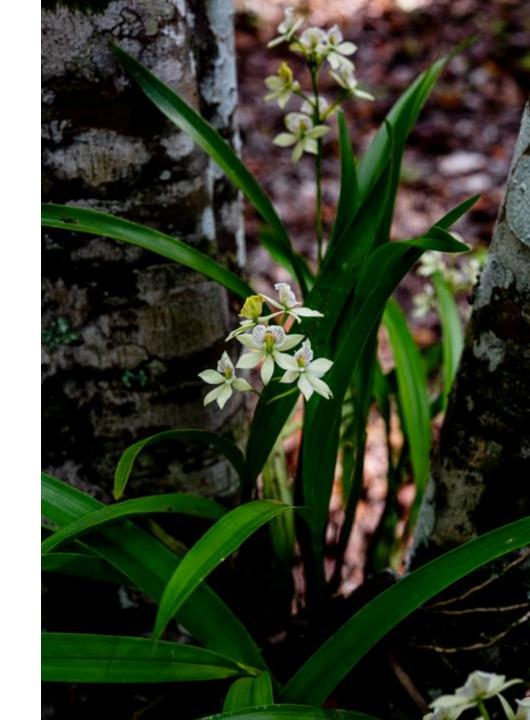


This and the following photos are by Nicholas Hellmuth, Oct. 8, 2018, in Grupo Maler, the northwestern part of Yaxha.

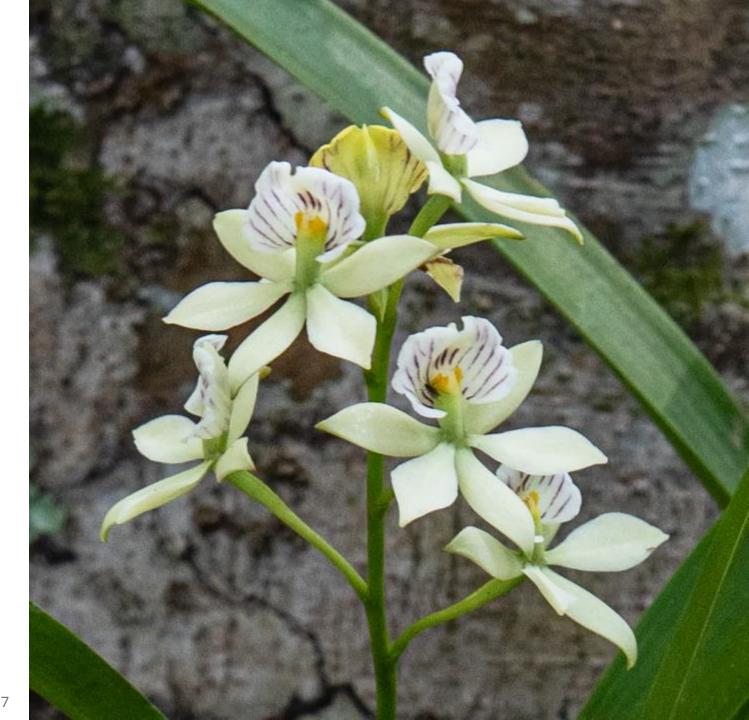


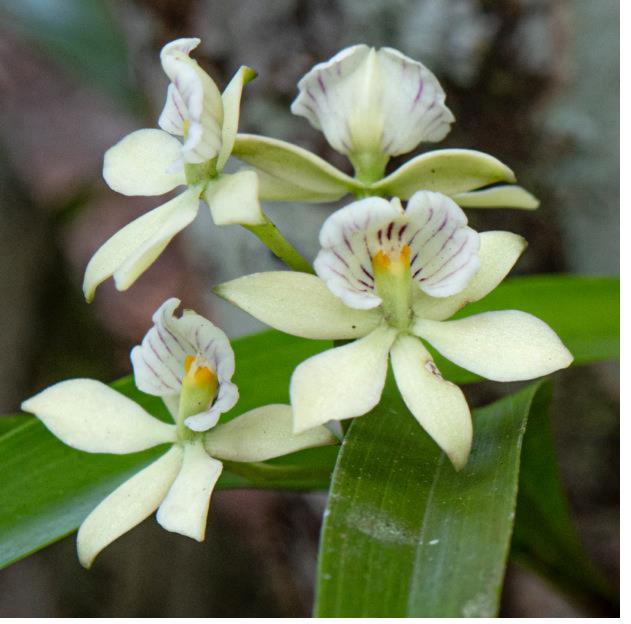


















These and the following photos of professional quality are by Roxana Leal, FLAAR Mesoamerica, Oct. 11, 2021.

So every year in October you can find these beautiful orchids blooming on the trunks of trees.

This orchid is on the same tree as the photo cropped for the front page of this FLAAR Reports.





Closeup photos of just the flower are most common, but the photo on this page shows a bit more of where this orchid is perched on the palo de jiote tree, Yaxha area of PNYNN.



My preferred style of photography is "front lit" with the sun behind me, shining on what I wish to photograph. But this orchid is "backlit" by the sun, so the white part of the flower is translucent.

Several species of orchids that we found in PNYNN had ants on the flowers. We show two species of such orchids in the following chapter.

Photo by Roxana Leal, Oct. 11, 2021, with iPhone 13 Pro Max.



All the following photos of *Prosthechea* radiata by David Arrivillaga are on the same palo de jiote as photographed by Roxana Leal, and on the same day, Oct. 11, 2021.

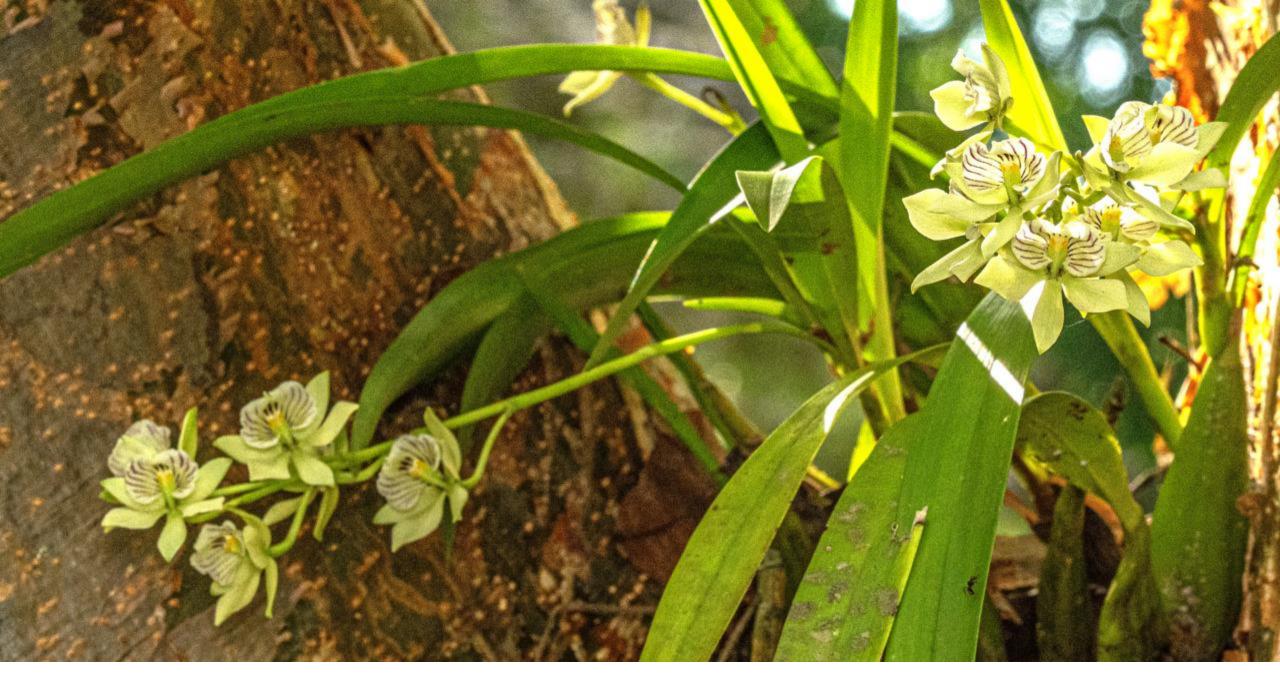
David used a Sony a1 (Alpha 1) with 90mm Sony FE 90mm F2.8 Macro G OSS lens.

Each photographer uses a different angle so a different view.









Palo de jiote trees are very common throughout Guatemala. We have two volumes on this tree for PNYNN.









Near Arroyo La Sardina, Yaxha to Nakum, PNYNN.

Aug. 24, 2018.

Photos by Nicholas Hellmuth with Nikon D810 with 200mm Nikkor telemacro lens.

Notable that this orchid was blooming in late August while all the photos from other years of the same species were early to mid-October. But in August, four of the buds were still not yet open.



Chapter 2

Epidendrum imatophyllum, PNYNN

Epidendrum
imatophyllum Lindl.
is shown in an
excellent photo by
Veliz, Mijangos and
Fialko 2010: page 9.

The photo to the right is from Grupo Maler, Yaxha, March 25, 2019, photo by Maria Alejandra Gutierrez.







An 800mm prime lens is essential to allow you to photograph orchids and bromeliads that are flowering high up in tall trees. Nakum, aguada near base camp, March 29, 2019.



Especially when you are using a tripod, and taking the photos in RAW mode (NEF for Nikon), then you can crop to show details, such as we did (above and same photo on the previous page).











Nakum camp area, March 29, 2019, photo by Maria Alejandra Gutierrez.





Nakum camp area, March 29, 2019, photo by Maria Alejandra Gutierrez.

These orchids were so high up in the trees that it was not possible to get macro close-ups of individual flowers or even clusters of flowers.



Chapter 3

Maxillaria egertoniana

These orchid flowers are not in clusters, there is just one flower on each stem.

Since these were not high up in the treetops we could achieve closer views.

Obviously most photos are of the front of a flower, but we like to also show a side view, when possible.







Even when you can't zoom in with the camera lens, when the camera is on a sturdy tripod and you are photographing in RAW mode, you can show the details by cropping down to just the flower itself.

We use Gitzo brand tripods and reliable tripod heads for decades. Cheap, low-bid tripods wobble.





When the tree trunk forks there is an open space where bromeliads and orchids can have a nice place to grow, without having to hold onto the bark.

Since many of these tree trunk crevices are at eye level or even lower, the orchids in these locations are easier to photograph.





Lots of Orchid Flowers of Peten have happy Ants wandering around the Flowers

At Yaxha and Nakum we found lots of orchid flowers with ants, which are surely wanting to slurp up the honey-like nectar inside the lower area of these orchid flowers.

To learn more, simply Google why do so many orchid flowers in Guatemala have ants on the flowers.

In the FLAAR Ethnobotanical Research Garden, Guatemala City, I have also often seen ants on the flowers.







Trichocentrum lindenii

The accepted name of *Oncidium lindenii* is *Trichocentrum lindenii* ((Brongn.) M.W.Chase & N.H.Williams. So page 12 photo captioned *Oncidium lindenii* in the nice book by Veliz, Mijangos and Fialko 2010 is really *Trichocentrum lindenii*

In this helpful book by Veliz, Mijangos and Fialko 2010 Oncidium pusillum (L.)Reichb. F. looks similar to the orchid that we show, but there are a few differences, so I prefer for an orchid-ologist to suggest the genus and species. Another problem with using that photo on page 12 is that when you see images for Oncidium pusillum that flower is bright yellow—which raises the question of whether the caption is confused—whether the photo at the lower left should really be named Oncidium lindenii (which also is no longer an accepted name—it's accepted name is now Trichocentrum lindenii ((Brongn.) M.W.Chase & N.H.Williams. Copy-and-paste mistakes are common for two photos on the same page.









Outstanding photo by David Arrivillaga, FLAAR Mesoamerica, an angle of view rarely available for this bizarre orchid. July 9 2019, Naranjo-Sa'al part of PNYNN. This impressive flower looks like a pig-snouted monster—great for a Hollywood horror film in the fiture.



Photo by Maria Alejandra Gutierrez. Photographed at Naranjo-Sa'al.

Vilma Fialko prepared a nice garden of plants rescued from trees that get blown over in heavy rain storms. So you can see lots of orchids close-up when you visit Naranjo-Sa'al.









Yellow Flowers, potentially *Trichocentrum ascendens*

Since our photos here show only the long masses of lots of flowers, and since the nice photos in the book by Veliz, Mijangos and Fialko 2010 show closeups (page 10, top right) I can only estimate that our photo shows *Oncidium ascendens* Lindl. When I Google Oncidium ascendens, synonym, accepted name, Al Overview responds in 1 second: The accepted name for *Oncidium ascendens* is *Trichocentrum ascendens*. *Oncidium ascendens* is now considered a synonym for this species, which belongs to the *Trichocentrum* genus rather than the *Oncidium* genus.

And when I click on Images, I see the same rows of flowers that are similar to what the FLAAR photos show. Since we had an iPhone XS, it did not (in those past years) accomplish good closeup views in any telephoto mode.

But I will estimate that we are looking at *Trichocentrum* ascendens, but I will accept suggestions by orchid specialists.



These photos were taken near Laguna Perdida, one of the lagoons west of Lake Yaxha in PNYNN. This Lagunita on all maps should be named Laguneta of 3 Conjoined Cenotes.

You can see this geological marvel (of three cenotes, filled with water all year, adjacent to each other, so "conjoined") in the following publication:

Nicholas Hellmuth, 2021: Yaxha Park Has Lots More Lagoons than just Yaxha and Sacnab. https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/Yaxha-Parks-Has-lots-More-Lagoons-than-just-Yaxha-and-Sacnab.pdf



Prosthechea cochleata

The photo caption of the photo for says that this orchid has flowers of yellow with purple: *Encyclia cochleata* (L.)LÉEME. Orquídea epífita, muy frecuente, de 20-50 cm de porte, Las flores vistosas, de color Amarillo con púrpura, de 3-7 cm de largo (Veliz, Mijangos and Fialko 2010: 9). But the sole photo has very dark colors. Our photos had bright sun shining on them, so are brighter colors.

Today in 2025, the accepted name for this orchid is *Prosthechea* cochleata. Encyclia cochleata is now a synonym.

Yaxha has monumental pyramids, temples, acropolises, ballcourts, and lots of causeways (calzada, sacbe). Naranjo-Sa'al has comparable and was a major Maya city-state in the Classic Periods, Nakum has a preserved sweatbath, impressive palaces and temples inside its main acropolis, and a rare "Roman arch" for the two inside doorways of Temple A. So PNYNN is worth visiting for the impressive Maya architecture. That said, you can also experience tropical flowers, giant trees, vines, orchids, bromeliads and lots more at each of these sites.



References Cited plus Books on Orchids that include Orchids of Guatemala

There are obviously thousands of articles and web pages on orchids, but all those you can find on-line. I prefer to list here the publications that can help you prepare for experiencing orchids at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo.

AMES, Oakes; CORRELL, Donovan S.

1952 Orchids of Guatemala. Fieldiana Botany Volume 26. Chicago Natural History Museum.

AMES, Oakes; CORRELL, Donovan S.

1985 Orchids of Guatemala and Belize. Chicago Natural History Museum. 799 pages.

ARCHILA, Fredy; Szlachetko, Dariusz L; CHIRON, Guy R.; LIPINSKA, Monika; MYSTKOWSKAM Katarzyna and Vincenzo BERTOLINI 2018 Orchid Genera and Species in Guatemala. Koeltz Botanical Books. 724 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas

2018 Aquatic Orchids? Bletia purpurea, Yaxha, Peten, Guatemala. FLAAR Mesoamerica. 43 pages in the downloadable PDF. https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Aquatic-orchids-vol1-Flora-Yaxha-FLAAR-Mesoamerica-Jan-2019-EN.pdf

HELLMUTH, Nicholas

2022 Wild Vanilla Orchid Vine Flowers Flowering in Seasonally Inundated Bajo Forests, Part 1, Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo (PNYNN), Reserva de la Biósfera Maya (RBM), Petén, Guatemala. FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala). 96 pages, PDF.

https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Yaxha-to-Nakum-PLUS-RBM-Vanilla-insignis-May-2022-NH_JG.pdf

VELIZ Perez, Mario; MIJANGOS, Ismael and Vilma FIALKO 2010 Guía Florística del Sitio Arqueológico Naranjo-Saal, Petén, Guatemala. 31 pages.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

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Licda. Merle Fernandez, CONAP

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all the helpful and knowledgeable guides of IDAEH CONAP at PNYNN who accompanied us each day. It is essential to have either an IDAEH and/or CONAP guardabosque or comparable when doing flora and fauna research in a national park.

ASSISTANCE FOR KNOWLEDGE OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS OF PNYNN

Teco, Moises Daniel Perez Diaz, park ranger, PNYNN

TENTS AND COOKING EQUIPMENT AT NAKUM CAMP, PNYNN

Manola Margot Lima Diaz owner of Restaurante El Portal de Yaxha, La Maquina

TARPS TO COVER AND PROTECT EQUIPMENT IN THE BACK OF OUR PICKUP TRUCK—AND TARPS TO COVER OUR TENT CAMPING AREA WHILE CAMPING IN REMOTE AREAS

We sincerely thank Mr. Segovia of Lonas Segovia for donating several giant tarps that are essential for our field trips to remote areas.

FLAAR was formed in 1969 to map Yaxha (and nearby Topoxte Island and Nakum) and during these years we worked with the president of Guatemala and the head of FYDEP to initiate protection of this area as a national park. Other conservationists added the Naranjo segment. Recently we were asked to return for flora, fauna, and biosphere field work from August 2018 to July 2019. This project was successful and as a result we were asked by CONAP to return for five more years, 2021-2025, of coordination and cooperation with them, both in the Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo national park plus all the rest of the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya.

Base Camp Assistance at Naranjo-Sa'al

We thank Arqueologa Vilma Fialko and Arquitecto. Raul Noriega for hospitality and place to stay and kitchen while doing field work in flora, fauna and wetlands ecosystems in the Naranjo-Sa'al area of PNYNN. We thank Horacio Palacios who assisted as a guide for how to reach the amazing Savanna West of Naranjo-Sa'al.

Base Camp Assistance at Yaxha

We thank Biologist Lorena Lobos and both co-administrators of PNYNN (Arq. Jose Leonel Ziesse (IDAEH) and Lic. Jorge Mario Vazquez (CONAP) for providing a place to stay for the photographers, biologists, and assistants of the FLAAR Mesoamerica team of flora and fauna during the 1-week-a-month field trips August 2018 through July 2019.

In turn FLAAR purchased and donated a cooking stove when the original one no longer functioned, plus we have photographed and documented many tree and insect species that we found around this camp.

Ecolodge El Sombrero

I thank Gabriella Moretti, owner of Ecolodge El Sombrero, for providing hotel room and meals while we have been doing field work at Parque Nacional Yaxha Nakum Naranjo. We also appreciate the hospitality of her sons Sebastian de la Hoz and Juan Carlo de la Hoz. Every workday is exhausting because we are carrying and then using very heavy cameras, super-telephoto lenses, sturdy tripods, large gimbals or ball tripod heads. Thus it is crucial for my health to be able to rest and totally recuperate every night in order to be ready for the following day of botanical and zoological adventures in Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo.

Equally crucial is having a place to charge the batteries of the computers, or all the cameras, and of the cell phones. Solar power is great, but it lasts only an hour, or less, if you plug in multiple computers and cameras and flash batteries to charge. So a place with enough electricity to charge the entire mass of essential field work equipment is essential and thus very much appreciated.

In order to post photographs on botanical and zoological websites, you can't do this if there is either no Internet or weak Internet. Thus it is very helpful that when we are provided rooms and meals, that Internet is also provided by the Ecolodge El Sombrero.

Contact Info: +502 5460 2934, VentasElSombrero@gmail.com or WhatsApp.

Donations make our Field Trips and Research and Publications Possible

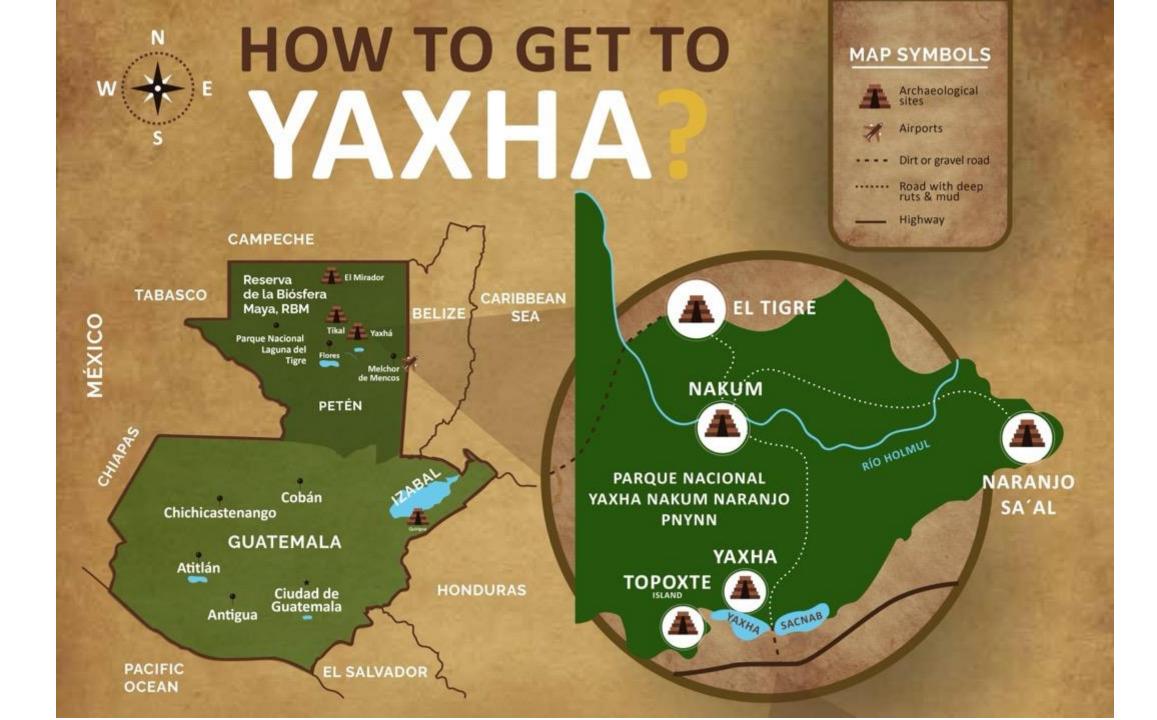
We appreciate a donation during November 2021 to help cover the costs of FLAAR research projects specifically to assist and support the current FLAAR project of flora and fauna in the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya (RBM). This donation also assisted the FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala) research project in the Municipio de Livingston area of the departamento of Izabal, Guatemala.

In a subsequent year we received an additional helpful donation from this family to help fund the field work and research and publications on flora, fauna and biodiverse ecosystems of PNYNN and surrounding RBM of Peten, Guatemala.

These donations are from a family in Chicago in honor and memory of botanist Dr John D. Dwyer, who worked in many areas of Mesoamerica, including in the Yaxha area in the 1970's while the site was being mapped by FLAAR.

These donations are also in recognition of the urgency and need for conservation of both wildlife and rare plants in the bio-diverse ecosystems of the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya (RBM) of Guatemala. Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo (PNYNN) is one part of the over 5 million acres of the RBM.

FLAAR is a non-profit research institute, tax exempt in USA.





Go to the Mundo Maya airport in Santa Elena and then you will find a services of tourist vehicles to go to the archaeological site. If you want to go by car from Guatemala City, take the following route: Río Dulce - Poptún-Flores. At the junction further on you will find on the left the route to Tikal. Go straight on to the right towards Yaxha (towards Melchor de Mencos). In km. 521 at the village La Maquina, turn left to the site. Ecolodge El Sombrero is 50 meters before the entrance to National Park Yaxha - Nakum - Naranjo.

The following four pages Show the Front Covers of the first Thirteen FLAAR Reports on Flowers of PNYNN worth Seeing and Learning About

The front covers are not yet hot links because we are still finishing these reports. But by end of October 2025, all thirteen will be on-line on www.Maya-ethnobotany.org and on other of our web sites.

We are also preparing FLAAR Reports on orchids and bromeliads of PNYNN.

FLAAR Reports on "How to Recognize which Tree Genus and Species by the Pattern, Color, or other Features of the Bark on their Trunk"

FLAAR Reports on edible insects of PNYNN. There are over 500 edible insects across Mexico, so we are looking for samples at PNYNN.

FLAAR Reports on waterbirds of PNYNN, published as part of a project of coordination and cooperation with FUNDAECO.

Bright Orange Flowers of *Cordia dodecandra,* Nakum Area of PNYNN, Peten, Guatemala



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Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)

Masses of Yellow Flowers, Genus *Combretum*, along road between Yaxha and Nakum, PNYNN



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Text and Photographs: Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)
October 2025

4-Petalled Flowers of River Banks, Lake Shores, and Seasonally inundated Savannas

Ludwigia octovalvis





Volume 2 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Flowers and bizarre Bracts of *Calathea lutea*, relative of *Heliconia* and of Banana Naranjo-Sa'al and Savanna of 3 Fern Species areas of Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo (PNYNN)

> Fresh Green Leaves of Calathea lutea are a great Alternative to Plastic

Volume 4 for Series:
Flowers worth experiencing at Parque
Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo,
PNYNN
Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten,
Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025



Costus pictus, Medicinal Flowers, Yaxha and Naranjo-Sa'al Areas of PNYNN

Volume 5 for Series:
Flowers worth experiencing at Parque
Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo,
PNYNN
Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM,
Peten, Guatemala



Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

A beautiful Red Flower, a Hibiscus Relative, but the Petals and Sepals never open Malvaviscus arboreus, Sleeping Hibiscus



Volume 7 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala Piscidia piscipula, Jabin, Dogwood, with Hummingbird Pollinator Yaxha and Nakum areas of Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo



Volume 6 for Series: Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

Photogenic wild Morning Glory Flowers of Nakum and Yaxha areas of PNYNN







Volume 8 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

Photogenic Bright Yellow Morning Glory Flowers of Genus Merremia



Nakum and Yaxha areas of PNYNN



Volume 9 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

Yellow Flowers & Fruits of Wild Undomesticated Squash Vines, *Cucurbita lundelliana*

Along the Shores of Lakes and Rivers in Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo



Volume 11 for Series:

Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala



Nicholas Helimuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)
October 2025

Yellow Flower Paradise, Yellow Flowers Covering the Tree Canopy Nakum, East of Savanna Bajo, PNYNN



Volume 10 for Series: Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala), October 2025

Orange Masses of Flowers of Parasitic Vine (but does not kill the host)
Genus Psittacanthus, Yaxha, Blom Sacbe and adjacent Grupo Maler



Volume 12 for Series: Flowers worth experiencing at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo, PNYNN Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, RBM, Peten, Guatemala

Text and Photographs: Nicholas Hellmuth FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala) October 2025

Yellow-Orange Flowers of Trees of the *Caesalpinia* species, Fabaceae family Bajo La Justa, between Yaxha and Nakum, PNYNN



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Gorgeous Yellow Masses of Flowers of

Haematoxylum campechianum

at Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum and Naranjo

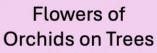
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surrounding the Maya Ruins of Yaxha, PNYNN

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