

Human Remains in Guatemalan Jungle Likely US Birdwatcher Missing Since 2023

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Human remains discovered in the dense Guatemalan jungle near the ancient Maya city of Tikal are believed to belong to Raymond Vincent Ashcroft, a 66-year-old American birdwatcher who vanished in February 2023. Local authorities, led by Carlos Soza of the Guatemalan Attorney-General's Office, reported that the remains were found alongside a lilac shirt, sandals, and shorts matching those Ashcroft was wearing when he disappeared.

Ashcroft had been part of a birdwatching group exploring Tikal, a UNESCO World Heritage site renowned for its towering pyramids and rich biodiversity. According to local media reports from 2023, his wife stated that Ashcroft decided to return to their hotel alone while she remained with the group to take photographs. When she returned to their room in Tikal National Park, he was nowhere to be found. She promptly reported him missing, sparking an immediate response from authorities.

Within half an hour of Ashcroft's disappearance, search parties scoured the area, supported by sniffer dogs navigating the park's thick vegetation. Despite these efforts, no trace of the American was found at the time. Interpol issued a yellow notice weeks later, but no sightings or clues emerged until recently, when villagers spotted human bones and clothing 14 kilometres from the Tikal archaeological site. In a recent interview with a local radio station, Carlos Soza explained, "The remains were located in dense jungle, accessible only on foot, making the discovery particularly challenging."

Soza confirmed that a DNA test is underway to verify if the remains are indeed Ashcroft's. The find has re-ignited attention on the dangers of the sprawling Tikal National Park, where tourists have previously gone missing. In 2022, a 53-year-old German man succumbed to heat stroke after becoming separated from his group. In contrast, a French family lost for two days in 2023 was found dehydrated but alive.

The discovery underscores the risks posed by the region's unforgiving terrain, where dense foliage and remote trails can quickly disorient even experienced visitors. As authorities await DNA results, the case serves as a sombre reminder of the challenges of ensuring safety in such vast, untamed landscapes.