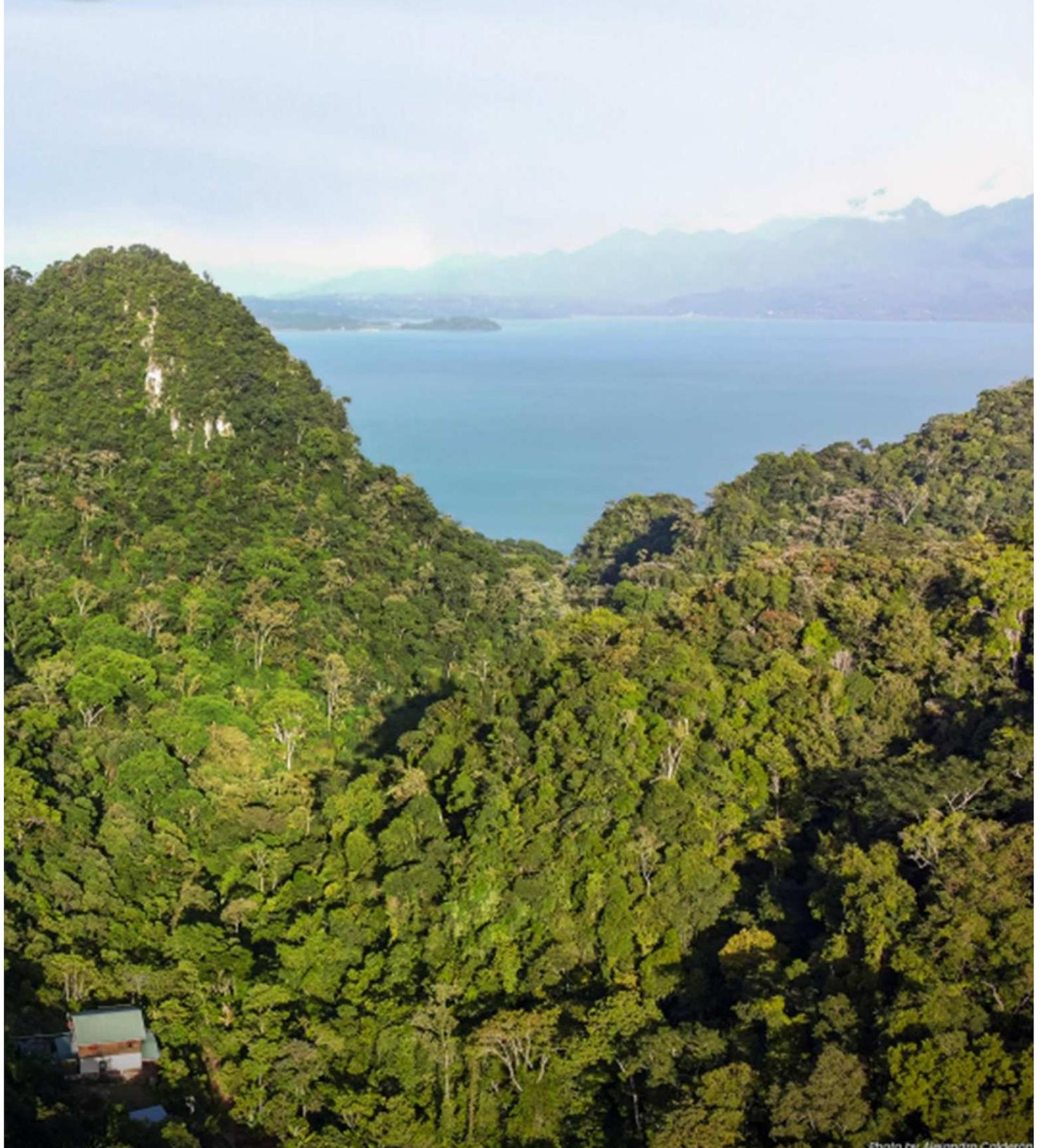




Friends of Emerald Valley

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

December 2023



Letter from the Editor

As we round the corner into another new year, we look forward to shooting for new goals, accomplishing more projects, and welcoming more visitors.

We finally finished the first deluxe cabin, and by mid 2024 we will have started the first duplex cabin. More people from around the world want to come and see Emerald Valley for themselves, enjoy an extended stay, and see many of the sites around the beautiful Lake Yojoa.

We have received our first international guest who stayed and photographed nearly 200 species of butterflies in only five days.

We have reached an astonishing 738 species of butterflies, a number that seems almost unfathomable. How high will this number reach?

We did it! We published the first butterfly guide for Honduras. This past June we held the official ceremony here at Emerald Valley. It was another proud day in our lives. Although we did the book, we will continue our research across the Honduran landscape.

We will strive to acquire additional lots of rainforest that are adjacent to Emerald Valley. It is the only effective way to conserve these species-rich forests. This is where you can help out.

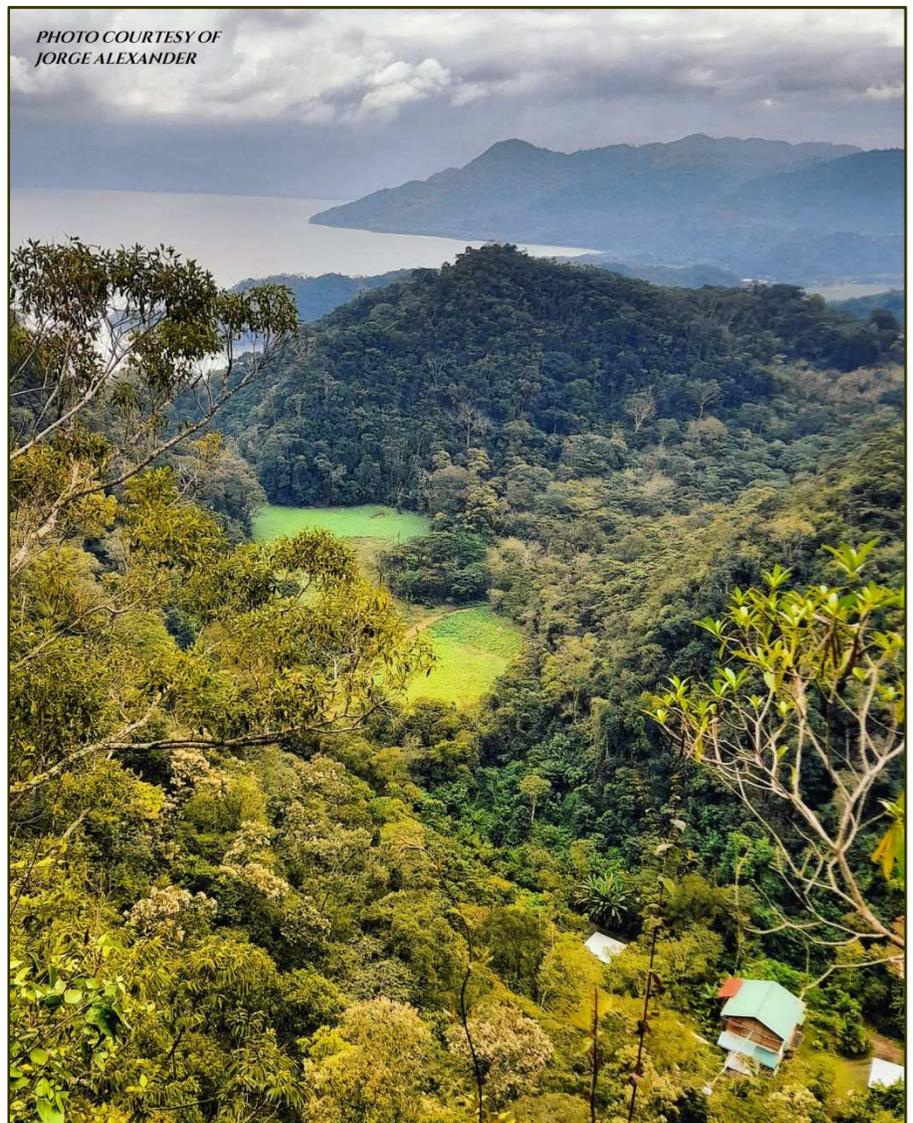
We invite all of you to come and participate in an event, stay at our cabin, and help support our ongoing efforts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B.J. Seed", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Our Vision at Emerald Valley

To create a model center, demonstrating how rainforest environments can be sustainably utilized by combining environmental education, biological research, and nature tourism strategies.

Since its inception, we have been slowly working on attaining goals to fulfill how we envision Emerald Valley and make it sustainable. We have made great strides on all fronts, including initiating the annual Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival, the only event of its kind in Latin America. School children come to participate and learn about their rich natural heritage. Our ongoing butterfly research has led us to document an amazing 738 species.



View of a part of Emerald Valley, taken from the ridgeline above the house. Lake Yojoa is in the background.

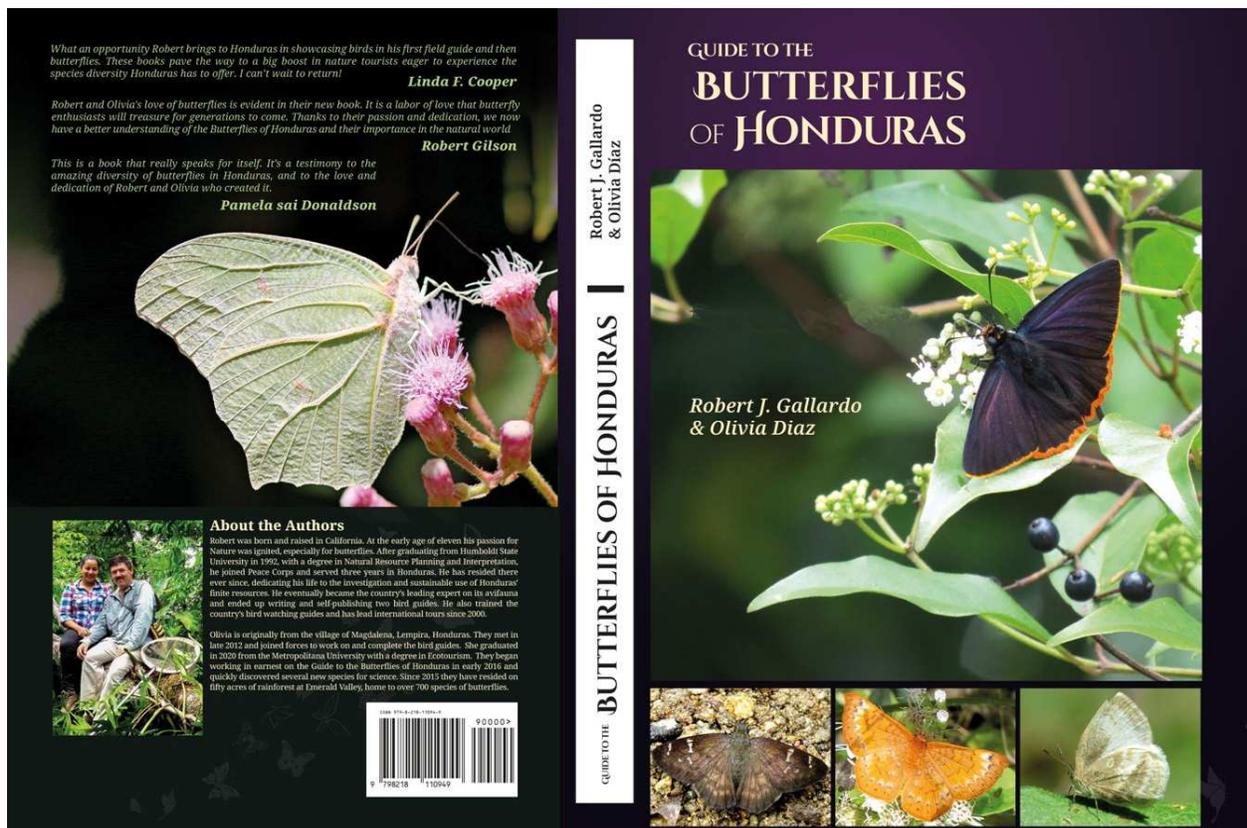
What's New at Emerald Valley

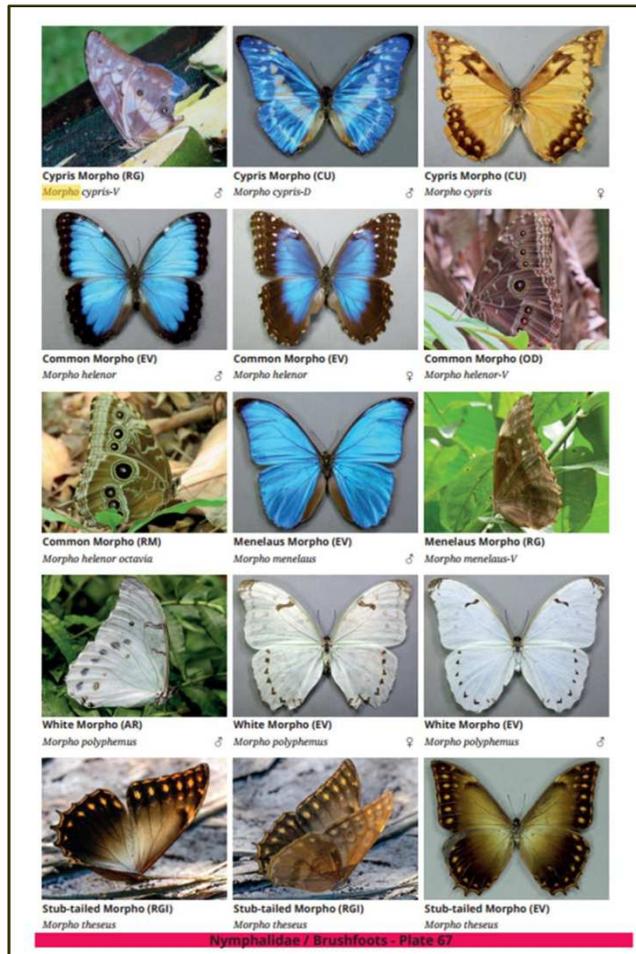
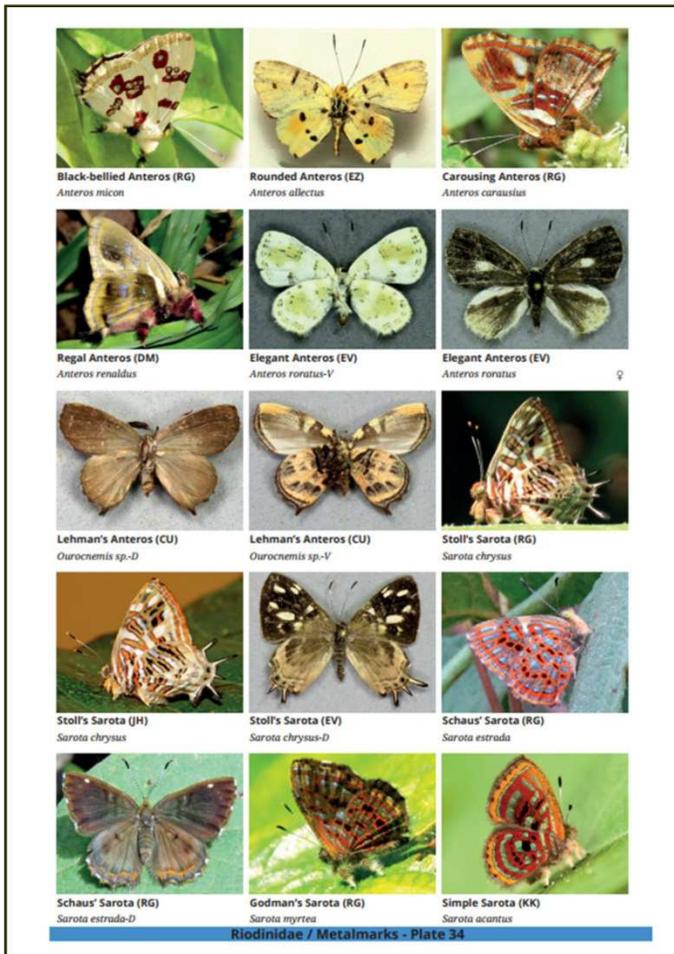
Six months has literally flown by since the first newsletter. Here is what has transpired since then.

“Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras”

In late 2022 we finished the final draft of the “Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras.” Additional country records were being found literally up to the last minute and we kept adding them to the nearly-finished book. We had to draw the line somewhere and finally stopped inserting new photos. Almost immediately after we sent the final pdfs to the printer, Harlin found another country record. His butterfly is featured in this newsletter.

Copies of the new book first reached our distributor in England and it has been selling well. The next batch reached Robert Gilson in the U.S. and many copies have already been sold. Finally, our 1-ton batch of books reached Honduras. It's always exciting to receive a book one has published.





Two of the 113 plates that appear in the book depicting 1,695 photographs.

As has been customary with the books we have published, we planned on having an official ceremony to celebrate the new book. On June 17th we held the event at Emerald Valley and nearly 100 people attended. Participants came from all across Honduras and we trucked everyone down into our piece of paradise. Most of Olivia's family was present to celebrate with us. The weather was gorgeous. We had just finished two overhead structures which would be put to good use. Tricia Burkhardt, Executive Director of the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, and her sister joined us. Our good friend (and graphic design specialist), Luis Cueva, had also come from Copan. At the last minute, we had to find another translator, and our friend Francisco Rovelo bailed us out. He also took a guitar and played and sang afterwards, much to everyone's delight.

Our speakers were all lined up which included Marco Carias (representative from IUCN), Osvaldo Munguia (he was also the M.C.), Giselle Larach (speaking on behalf of her mother), Edman Muñoz, Tricia, mom, Olivia, and myself. As was also customary, tears were shed. Olivia could barely get through her first sentence and broke down. We also honored several people who contributed many photos to the book (Harlin, Ismery, and Edwin). Those moments were priceless as so many people were involved in the making of this book and know how hard it is to accomplish goals such as these. But it's always worth it. Our friend and chef, Sonia, and the

crew fed us all. We then had the book signing session and had part of the butterfly collection on display. I was in a suit and tie and had to shed a layer. Later on it would rain, and then the electricity went out. Our party was cut short, but Sonia still pulled off the BBQ and stuffed jalapeño peppers. It was a joyous day filled with memories that would last a lifetime. This is but a first edition and we plan on doing one final book; a second more detailed edition of the butterflies of Honduras, replete with individual range maps. It will be the last book and we plan on undertaking an additional 10-15 years of field work before publishing it.



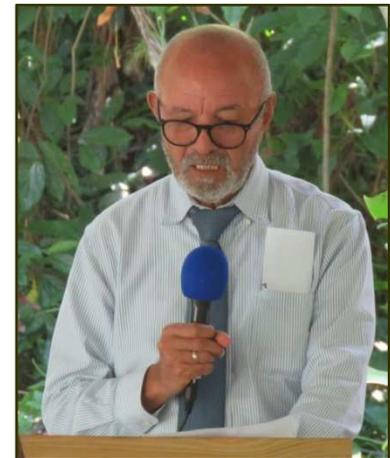
Book launch ceremony filled with emotions-participants from many walks of life.



Edman Muñoz



Marco Carias



Osvaldo Munguia



Giselle Larach



Ellie Gallardo



Tricia Burkhardt



Olivia Diaz

Harlin M., Ismery H. & Edwin M. receiving a recognition.



*Exequiel & family with
Robert & Olivia*



Olivia & Robert signing books.

In Europe the book can be purchased with NHBS at the following link: [Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras | NHBS Field Guides & Natural History](#)

In North America the book can be purchased with Fauna Ventures at the following link: [STORE - Fauna Ventures Butterfly Tours](#)

Cabin-Ever since we acquired the three properties, we had the vision of installing a small eco-lodge where people could come and relax. There is so much to do and see around the greater Lake Yojoa basin that we will be offering all-inclusive, 7-8 day packages that will include bird and butterfly watching, a boat tour, option to go kayaking on the lake, hikes to look for quetzals, and to just enjoy the exuberant life of Emerald Valley from the cabin decks. Optional trips to other places in the country will be offered as well.

Each cabin is being built on the hillside with great views of the bird, butterfly, and mammal-friendly gardens. Ever since hunting has been stopped, we are seeing an increase in small mammal populations. 2-3 groups of Coatimundis now roam the property and will sometimes come close to feed on ripening bananas. More agoutis are also being seen and now there is evidence of Ocelot along the upper slopes. Hordes of oropendolas and other birds come in to feed on fruiting melastome shrubs. Dazzling hummingbirds feed daily on purple and pink porterweed, *Heliconias*, different shrimp flowers, and other plants. Do we need to mention the spectacular butterfly show that goes nearly year-round?

There are no neighbors and we are blessed with 24 hours of quietness. Owls and pauraques call at night, and chachalacas may wake you at dawn, but no human produced sounds will bother.



Spacious cabin deck, complete with chairs, table, and two hammocks.

Until a full restaurant is built, meals will be served on the cabin deck or front deck of the house. Delicious meals (and a variety of homemade desserts) are furnished by Olivia.

In October 2023 the first deluxe cabin was finished. It holds a queen and double bed, and original art adorns the walls. A large, covered, wrap-around deck is the perfect place to relax. Choose a chair or a hammock. Contact us for availability and bookings.



Commanding view from the cabin deck, surrounded by the lush rainforest.



Spacious and comfortable cabin interior.

Upcoming Activities, Events, etc.

Butterfly Festival-This upcoming January (2023) we will hold the 5th annual Emerald Valley Butterfly festival. Each year the event gets better and better. More people from different countries are attending and witnessing the incredible diversity of species around Lake Yojoa and we're seeing more species. During the last, event we recorded an amazing 320 species. Robert and Olivia have been working hard to install the cement pathways into the terraced butterfly garden above and behind the cabin. Most of it should be useable by the time the festival comes around.

Follow the link to find out more about the upcoming butterfly festival at Emerald Valley:
[Honduras - Fauna Ventures Butterfly Tours](#)

Research News

Country Records

Since the release of the recent butterfly guide, twenty-four additional country records have been found, including one from Roatán Bay Island that is likely another undescribed species. Recall that toward the end of the butterfly guide, there is a list of nearly five-hundred additional species that could still be found in Honduras. We have our work cut out for us!

The first country record since the release of the book was found by Harlin Maldonado at his

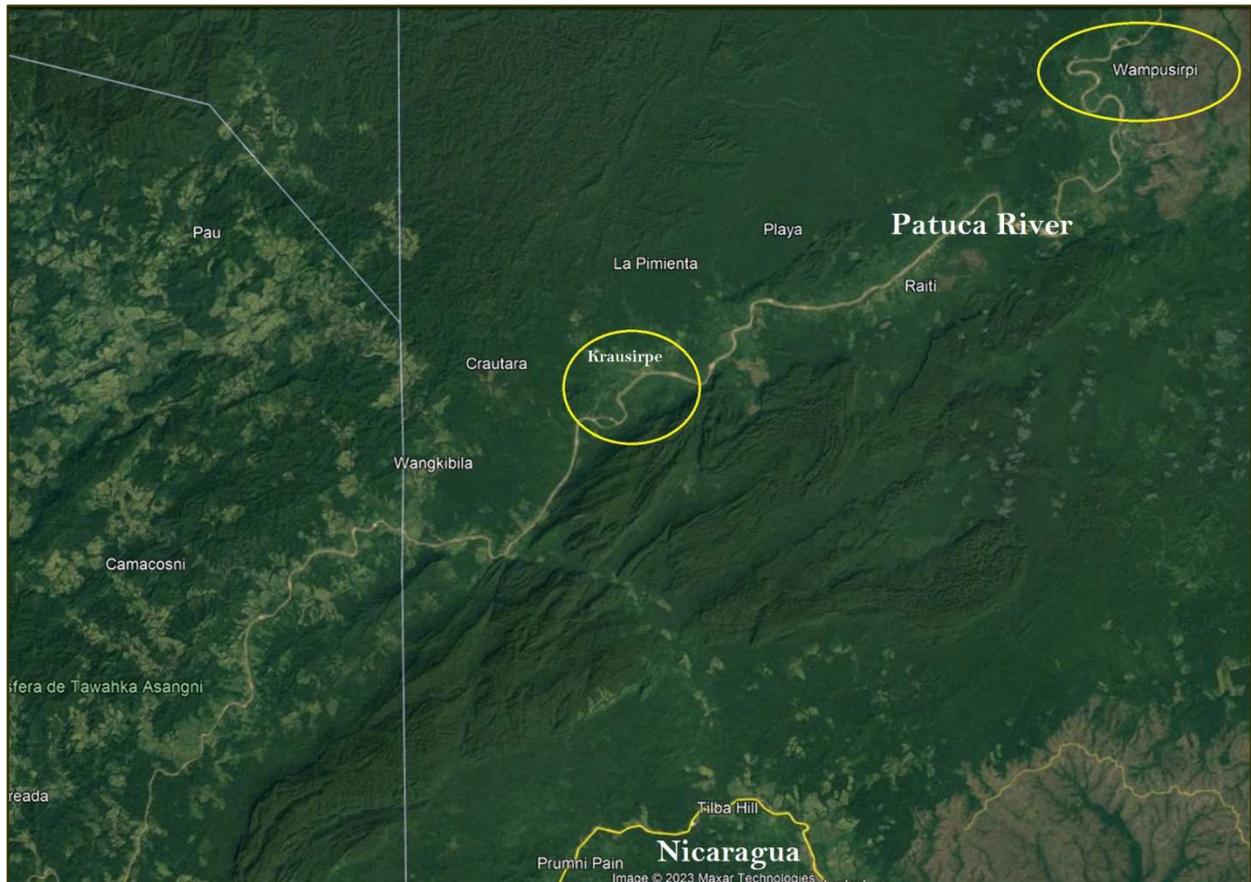


home in Puerto Cortes. On December 31, 2022 he found the lovely Chiricana Skipper (*Thracides chiricana*) that was previously known only from Costa Rica and Panama. It was a great way to start work on a future second edition butterfly guide.

Chiricana Skipper

La Mosquitia

Thanks to a generous donation, Robert and Olivia were able to undertake a research expedition to a remote site in eastern Honduras. It would represent the first time anyone had travelled to that area in search for butterflies. With the assistance of Alejandro Calderon, local guide and friend, they planned an eight day trip to the Tawahka-Asagni Reserve that straddles the Nicaraguan border.



A section of eastern Honduras showing the location of the Tawahka Reserve

We flew from La Ceiba directly to the remote town of Wampusirpi where supplies were bought and then boarded a boat to the village of Krausirpe ways up the Patuca River. We stayed one night there in some nice cabins. We met with local guides and went over the reason why we were there and where we wanted to go.

The following day we loaded everything into a small motor boat and went upriver only a short distance. We were dropped off and agreed to have the boatman return in several days to pick us up. We passed through a cattle pasture which is becoming the norm in much of Central America. We reached the foot of the forested mountain and hiked up a short distance. The local guides found a spot in the nearby ravine where there was still water. It had been a particularly dry summer and water was scarce. We made base camp along the ridgeline and got busy putting up

fruit traps in old socks as well as several canopy traps. We pitched tents and were ready to see what we could find.



Base camp inside the rainforest

We spent the next three days checking the traps and descending to the edge of the cattle pasture. Since it was so dry, it appeared that the overall species diversity and numbers of butterflies was low. Nonetheless, we were able to turn up four country records at that locale and photographs of living individuals for which we only had specimens.



Country records

Cleomestra Leafwing (Memphis cleomestra)



Thick-rimmed Sailor (Dynamine chryseis)

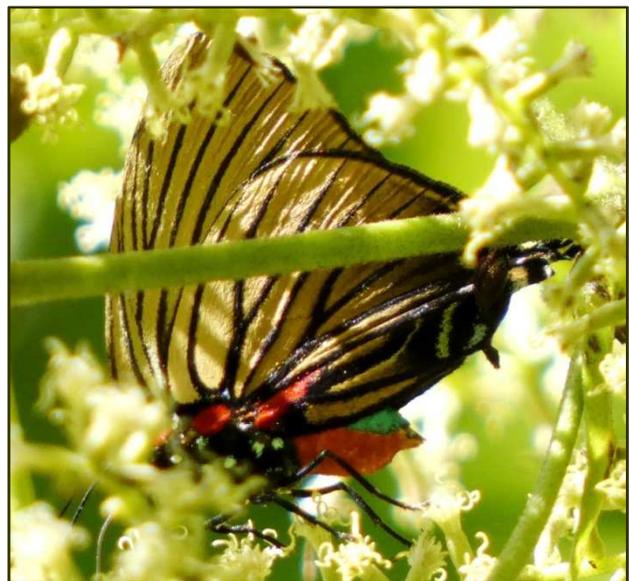
Emerald Valley

Emerald Valley continues to provide surprise after surprise, in terms of the new butterfly species that continue to show up. Robert and Olivia are in the process of reproducing (with cuttings) two new species of native plants; (*Baccharis trinervis*-Asteraceae) and another that likely pertains to the genus *Mikania*. The *Baccharis* is being brought in from a nearby mountain and is a straggly vine/shrub that produces small, white flowers for numerous months. It draws in many species of hairstreaks and metalmarks.

Bitter Vine (*Mikania micrantha*) has already been documented on the property, but this new species of vine has different leaves and blooms earlier. Its specific name is still being investigated and it is unknown how it arrived at Emerald Valley. Like the Bitter Vine, its fine seeds were likely blown in by the wind. This new plant is already attracting a wide variety of hairstreaks and some metalmarks. On December 6th, the first property record was found on it; a



Norax Hairstreak



Black-veined Hairstreak (Atlides polybe)

Norax Hairstreak (*Ignata norax*). On December 10th, during Robert and Olivia's tenth anniversary, they recorded four additional property records on this flower. Exequiel and family were visiting and Mattis spotted the lovely Black-veined Hairstreak. The rarest species to show up so far was the Garnet-patched Hairstreak. These new records bring the property list up to 738 species, representing 57% of the country's total.



Red-costa Metalmark (Symmachia probetor)



Garnet-patched Hairstreak (Nicolaea velina)

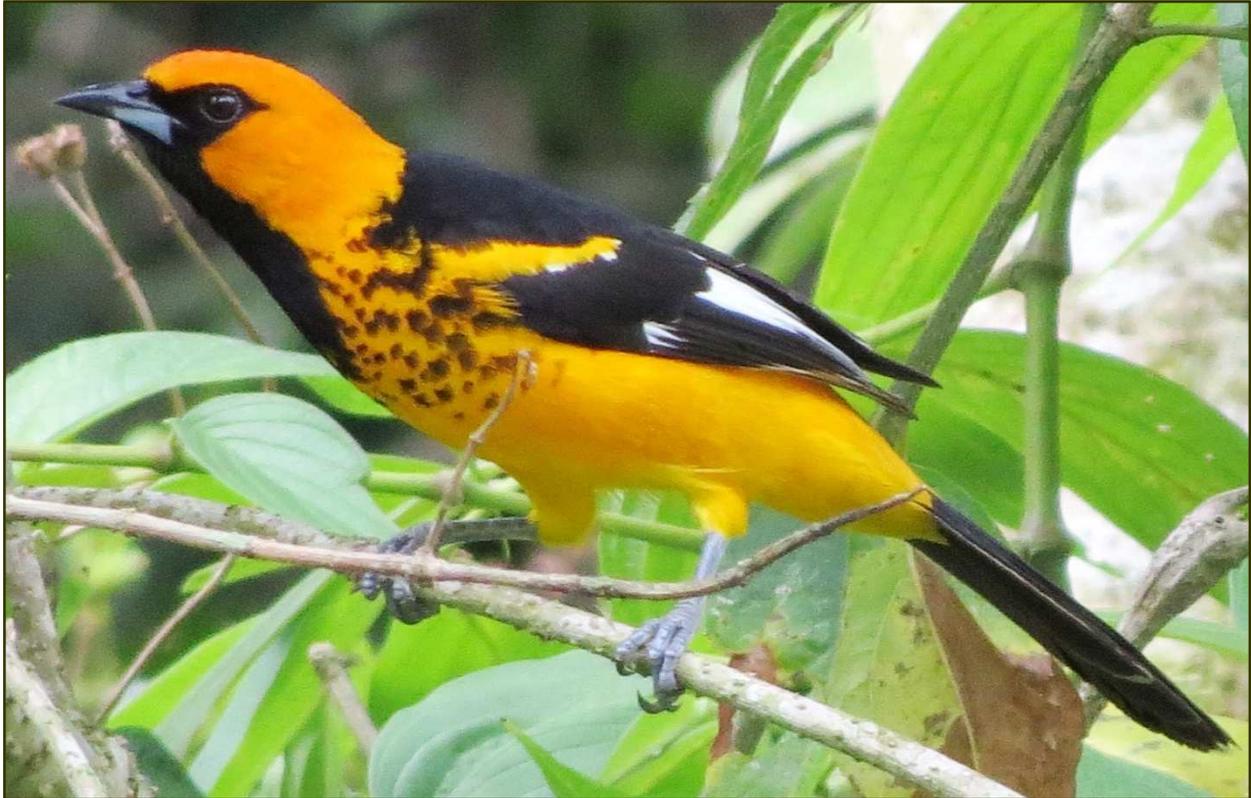
The upcoming blooming cycle of the Blue Mistflower will mark the second consecutive year when Robert and Olivia will undergo an intensive, day-to-day monitoring effort. They aim to document exactly how many species of butterflies visit these flowers during each season with the goal of publishing another article in three to four years. During the first season of intense monitoring (Dec. 2022 & Jan. 2023), they recorded 303 species. To date, 360 species have been recorded feeding on mistflower, including all 39 species of sulphurs that have been found at Emerald Valley. Those who come before the annual butterfly festival, during the event, and afterwards, all contribute to this inventory.

We aim to continue to expand the flower gardens a little each year. This will not only enhance the experience of those who come to see the butterflies, but also provide opportunities to document more species for the country.

Featured Flora & Fauna

Bird-The Spot-breasted Oriole (*Icterus pectoralis*) is one of ten species of orioles that occur in Honduras. It resides in humid and dry forest habitats and occurs from sea level to about 5,000 ft. At Emerald Valley, it spends most of its time high in the treetops but will descend lower into shrubs. In May 2016 we found one nesting in a small *Cecropia* tree at the lower end of the property. What was strange about the nest is that it was made in a hammock form, unlike the

typical basket nest they typically make. We could never ascertain if this was, in fact, the first record of a hammock nest for this species.



Adult Spot-breasted Oriole



Hammock-style nest discovered on a small Cecropia in May 2016.

Butterfly-Salvin's Satyr (*Splendeptychia salvini*)-This lovely satyr was discovered on the property on August 18, 2017 along a path that would later lead to Skipper Pass. It was a country record and we knew it was something special. Photos were sent to experts and then a leg (to extract DNA) to ascertain its status. This species was described from one specimen found in Panama in the 1960's and has never been seen since. The only one that had a similar appearance occurs in Peru so we thought that ours may have represented an undescribed species. It turned out that ours is the same species that occurs in Peru, and oddly enough, is not found anywhere else in between. This satyr would represent the first big discovery from Emerald Valley. The larva is believed to utilize the fine-leaved bamboo that grows along the steep slopes. In 2021, the bamboo went to seed and it all died off. The satyr has all but disappeared, with only one sighting in 2022. We can only hope that this unique species has been able to utilize a substitute hostplant until the bamboo grows back



Salvin's Satyr-occurs only at Emerald Valley in all of Central America.

Plant-Blue Mistflower (*Chromolaena odorata*)-What better plant to give tribute to than this one? Emerald Valley owes much of its recognition to this plant. Where did it come from? It was already here. On January 1, 2018 I happened to look out the back door out into the weedy field. Recall that when we bought the first property, the lower slope and flat area was a corn and bean field. We built the house and started to let Nature take its course. Rising up from all the weeds (native plants) was one that had light purple flowers and I noticed it was attracting a lot of butterflies. I ended up putting a five gallon bucket in the shade of a small tree and documented

many country records that had come in. From then on, Rodolfo (our gardener) had instructions not to chop anything sprouting that looked like this plant. Our mistflower 'garden' started to get bigger and bigger, and each year would attract more and more butterflies. The blooming season typically runs from the third week in December to late January. We noticed that this is the only plant (known to us) which draws in butterflies from all six families. Species readily descend from the nearby forest canopy and leave the safety of the forest interior to



Thousands of flowers in bloom.

nectar in the garden. One can witness clouds of butterflies in the gardens on a sunny day and enjoy the sweet odor of the flowers.



Paved paths in the main mistflower garden.

Rising out of this natural phenomenon was born the idea of holding a butterfly festival, which has now grown to be an international, annual event. There are now two main mistflower gardens with paved paths where visitors can photograph hundreds of butterflies. We are now heading into our fifth festival.

Also stemming out of the diversity of species that are attracted to these flowers was born the idea of doing a more formal study. During the 2022-2023 blooming cycle, Robert and Olivia surveyed the gardens virtually every day and recorded all the species. The total came to 303 species. Together with previous records, the total is 360 species. Half of all species recorded at Emerald Valley have been seen feeding on these flowers. This is why we have coined the term ‘Mistflower Power!’ We will be carrying out a five-year study with the plan of publishing a scientific paper detailing our findings.



The first butterfly festival at Emerald Valley-January 2020

Reaching Out

In November, Robert travelled to Texas to attend the Texas Butterfly Festival, Rio Grande Bird Festival, co-lead a Naturalist Journeys tour, and visit friends in Missouri. While in Missouri, he stayed with Gene Gardner and Liz Cook where he was befriended their new dog, Libby.

While in Missouri, he went out bird watching a couple of times to a local park and a wetland refuge. It was amazing to see how much a State can do for wildlife when they put their minds to it. Missouri has set a great example for the rest of the U.S. After a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner, Robert gave a presentation at the Runge Nature Center that focused on migrating birds. Of the 46 species of migrant species that have been documented at Emerald Valley, 21 of them

breed in Missouri. The connection between breeding areas and overwintering sites is very important. Declining species, such as Wood Thrush, continue to lose ground each year on both ends.

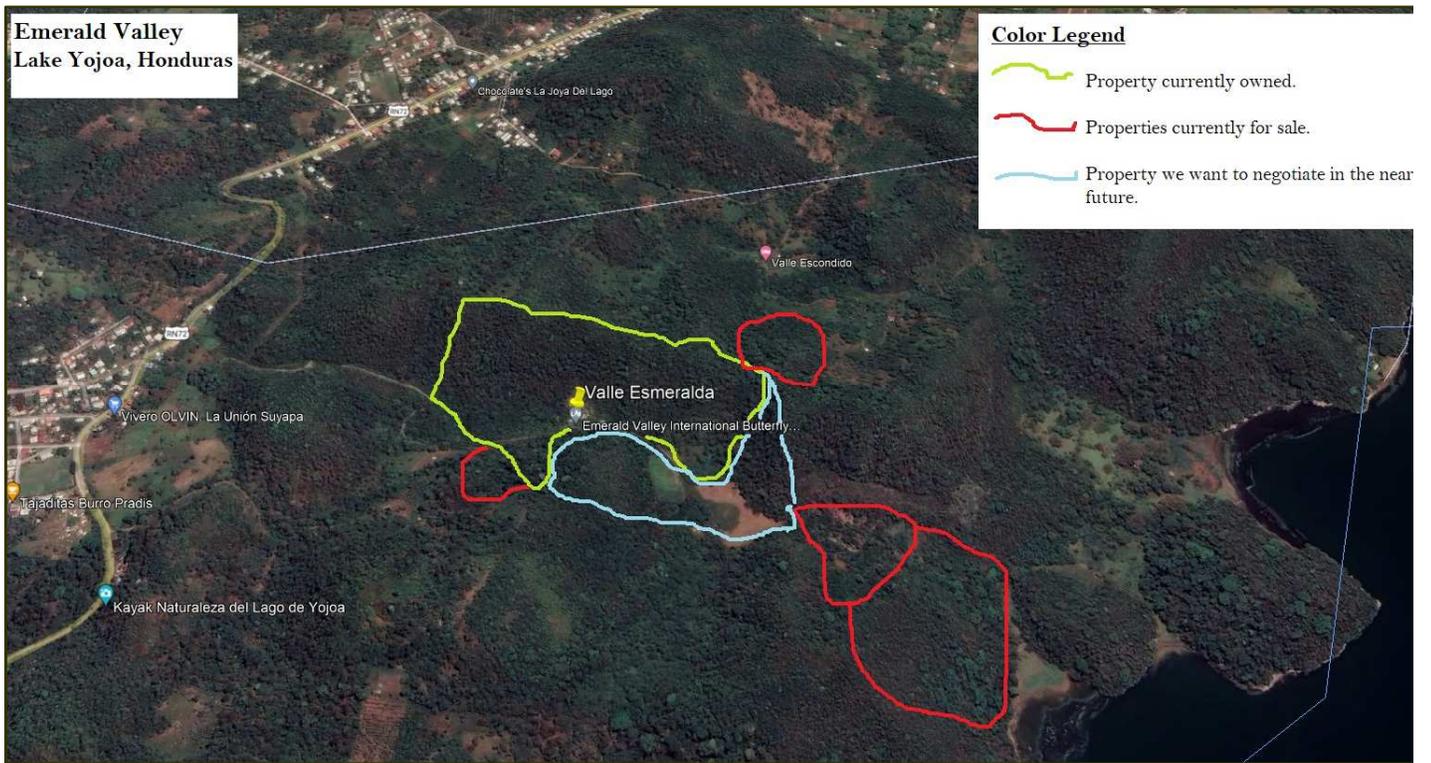


Robert giving a presentation at the Runge center in Missouri.



Tricia Burkhardt opening the presentation

We are currently in the process of working with the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF) to acquire additional lots of rainforest adjacent to Emerald Valley to ensure the survival of many Neotropical migrants on their wintering grounds. If you would like to help us acquire more rainforest please see "Donations" at the end.



Map of Emerald Valley and surroundings. At the moment, there are four lots totaling nearly 44 acres that are being offered to Robert & Olivia.

Since the original three purchases totaling fifty acres, the wildlife has benefitted tremendously. There is now evidence of Ocelot and Paca, Agoutis are reproducing, there are more Coatis, Gray Fox, and Armadillos. Toucan and parrot nests are no longer poached. The purchasing of additional acreage will ensure long-lasting protection of this rich mid-elevation rainforest and all of its inhabitants.

Testimonials

In each issue we will include testimonials from those who have visited Emerald Valley and those who support programs. Each person comes and leaves with different experiences and we'd like to share them with everyone.

“Im Robert’s mother, who had ridden his shirttails for years! What an exciting adventure it has been. First birds, then traipsing around Honduras looking for butterflies. I have seen the development of Emerald Valley from the very beginning and what a wonderful place he and Olivia have built! A beautiful butterfly paradise for lepidopterists to enjoy who come from near and far to feast their eyes on the fabulous fliers!”

Ellie Gallardo-U.S.



Ellie holding up a handmade, hand painted bag depicting the endemic butterfly that carries her name.

“I first had the privilege of visiting Emerald Valley in Honduras in February of 2021, and had such a great experience that I returned in 2022 for a second visit! Olivia and Robert are excellent hosts, and Olivia is certainly a really good cook. They have constructed very private and comfortable accommodations, and the surrounding habitat is excellent for a wide variety of butterflies, moths, and birds. Robert is one of those rare guides with expertise in both birds and butterflies, which made both of my visits extremely productive. I look forward to a third visit to look for those crepuscular skippers!”

Joe Thompson, U.S.



Joe during his visit to Honduras

“Para el que mira sin ver, la tierra es la tierra nada mas, conocer a Robert Gallardo y Olivia Diaz es saber que van a amar y cuidar la naturaleza. Valle Esmeralda es un lindo paraíso forjado con el amor y el esfuerzo de ambos que nos ofrece un lindo santuario de mariposas de mil colores y aves que se sienten libres donde jamás van a ser enjauladas. Valle Esmeralda el único lugar donde se lleva a cabo el único festival de mariposas, organizado cada año con la misma alegría que el primero, nos sentimos orgullosas de formar parte de este festival y poder mostrar al mundo que en Honduras existen lugares bellos y gente como Robert y Olivia que aman la naturaleza y a nuestro país.”

Rosa Maria Alger Pineda, Honduras



“Seeing is believing, and what the Earth reveals. Meeting Robert Gallardo and Olivia Diaz one knows that they love and care for Nature. Emerald Valley is a beautiful paradise, forged with love and the effort of both. This lovely butterfly and bird sanctuary offers us a thousand colors that fly freely and will never be encaged. Emerald Valley is the only place where a butterfly festival takes place, organized each year with the same positive energy as the first. We feel honored to take part in this festival and be able to show to the world that in Honduras exists beautiful places and people like Robert and Olivia, who love Nature and our country.”

*Rosa Maria Alger Pineda,
Honduras*

“Tuve el privilegio de visitar Valle Esmeralda y quedé sumamente impresionada por la vasta Naturaleza que se encuentra en este bellissimo rincón de Honduras. La familia Gallardo ha convertido este lugar en un paraíso para disfrutar no solo del aire puro, sino para deleitarse con el mundo singular de mariposas y aves que se encuentran libres en su hábitat natural. Como hondureña me siento orgullosa de que nuestro país cuenta con sitios tan únicos y bellos. Ningún hondureño debería quedarse sin visitar este hermoso lugar.”

Ada Margarita Hernández, Honduras.

“I had the privilege to visit Emerald Valley and was left totally in awe by the pure Nature that this remote site in Honduras harbors. The Gallardo family have converted this place into a paradise to not only enjoy clean air, but also to take pleasure in the singular world of butterflies AND birds that fly freely in their natural habitat. As a Honduran, I am proud knowing that our country has such unique and beautiful places. Every Honduran should visit this place.”

Ada Margarita Hernández, Honduras



“I was privileged to attend the Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival in 2023 and I cannot say enough positive things about the experience. I was a new ‘butterflyer’ but this well-designed tour was absolutely transformational. It was such a pleasure to get so close to these gorgeous creature, not at all people or camera-shy the way birds can be. The sheer number and types of butterflies was almost overwhelming. I am glad they don’t sing because it would be been sensory overload! All aspects of this tour are incredible, from the special lodgings and landscapes to terrific local food and drinks. Robert Gallardo, his partner Olivia Diaz, and all the other invited guides are there to help new initiates and expert butterflyers ‘get on’ and ID all the terrific insect life that flock to the mistflowers, other plantings, and bait stations during the festival. This is an incredibly high value experience and a trip well worth taking.”

Carrie Miller, U.S.



“**Hola**, soy Fredy Montero Abril, colombiano. ¡A inicios de este año tuve la posibilidad de conocer por primera vez la nación de Honduras! He recibido la amable invitación para asistir al 3° festival de Mariposas del Valle de la Esmeralda. Gracias a los señores Robert Gallardo y Robert Gilson esta interesante iniciativa se hizo realidad. Allí, Olivia Díaz y Ellie, además de la familia de Olivia y sus invitados, hicieron de esta semana de viaje un evento muy especial e inolvidable para muchos de nosotros los asistentes.

Decenas y decenas de Mariposas en el jardín de los “Blue Mistflower” y otras muchas más en los comederos alimentados con frutas fermentadas completaron las observaciones en esta Reserva Natural.

Por primera vez tuve la experiencia de visitar un país centro americano, con el plan de compartir, hacer fotografías y observaciones sobre Mariposas diurnas, para mí una experiencia preciosa. Siempre preguntaba a Robert, sobre donde podría fotografiar a *Anartia fatima*, y su risa venia inmediatamente. Muchas especies que habían llamado mi atención en la bibliografía pude complacer mis ojos y cámara en este viaje.

Que buena energía y recibimiento por parte de los hondureños, en sus lindos hospedajes, personas que vinieron a acompañar el evento y los lugares visitados para avistar Mariposas fueron especiales y agradables.

Admirado por la gran cantidad de especies que conocía la primera vez y esperando regresar en un futuro a un próximo festival, agradezco por esta importante invitación. ¡Abrazos desde Colombia!”

Fredy M. Abril, Colombia

“**Hi**, I’m Fredy Montero Abril, from Colombia. At the beginning of this year I had the privilege to travel to Honduras for the first time! I had the kind invitation to attend the 3rd Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival. Thanks to Robert Gallardo and Robert Gilson, this interesting initiative was made a reality. There, Olivia Diaz and Ellie, and the rest of Olivia’s family and guest, made this week a very special and unforgettable event.

There were dozens and dozens of butterflies in the Blue Mistflower gardens and others on the fruit feeders, adding to the sightings in this natural reserve.

For the first time I had the experience of visiting a Central American country, with the idea of sharing, taking pictures and notes of butterflies, and for me it was a wonderful experience. I was

always asking Robert where I could photograph the Banded Peacock, and his smile came immediately. I was able to observe many species that I had wanted to see during this trip.

What great energy and welcoming on behalf of the Honduran people, amidst their beautiful homes. I met many that came to attend the event and elsewhere we went to see butterflies.

I was thrilled to see so many butterfly species for the first time and hope to return to the festival in the future and am thankful for the invitation. Hugs from Colombia.”

Fredy M. Abril, Colombia



“I had the joy of participating in the Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival for the first time in 2023.

On the first morning, I was wondering what I was getting myself into. We’d had heavy rains, the weather was iffy, and the roads were rough. But Robert was still excited to bring us all out, managing to maneuver his truck through the steep hills and mud. Of course, he was right – the clouds parted and the butterflies started flying.

The festival really was heaven for anyone with any appreciation for nature. Robert is rightfully proud of his terraced gardens of mistflowers. Hundreds, if not thousands, of butterflies were all over the flowers, with a few dozen people pointing out beauties to former strangers and everyone snapping pictures. Some of the children were among the best at spotting rare and unusual butterflies. Even with different languages, everyone made new friends. Our common love of butterflies seemed to dissolve any barriers.

And yet, there is so much more to the property! I particularly enjoyed the trail up the mountain, near which Robert has set several fruit bait logs. I could spend the day enamored by the Morpho butterflies gliding about and various satyr species bouncing around the forest floor. But I also enjoyed strolling the lane, spotting leafwing butterflies hiding in plain sight in the trees, and tiny hairstreaks nectaring on native vines. I wanted to be everywhere, all at once!

Another thing I learned is that some butterflies can be noisy. I had seen a “cracker” species in Texas, but had not experienced the reason for that name until arriving at Emerald Valley. It was fun to watch these butterflies fighting over a bait log and loudly crackling! I saw five different species of Crackers, including the gorgeous male Starry Cracker, with metallic blue spots on black.



Our group attended all three days of the Festival and that was not close to enough time to fully appreciate the property and all the butterflies. Luckily, Robert’s helpers were busy working on a guest cabin which will look out over the gardens. But during the butterfly festival, a number of butterflies were already enjoying the cabin area!

While celebrating the last day of the festival, it was bittersweet. Olivia and her family served an incredible meal and we were all able to share our thanks and appreciate for Robert and Olivia.

So far, I only attended in 2023, but I certainly plan on attending again!”

Kathy Barylski, U.S.

“My wife and I went to Emerald Valley in January 2023 for the Butterfly Festival and were blown away! From what we had read online it sounded like a pretty special place with so many butterflies. Robert and Olivia have transformed a small farm into an incredible place to visit, and hosted an amazing festival. They strive to instill their love and fascination for the natural world to all who come, and always have a big smile to greet you. Their enthusiasm inspires. Seeing so many people excited and spellbound by all the different butterfly species was really wonderful. Folks would call out what they found from throughout the gardens, and the only dilemma we faced was which direction to head to photograph one of several butterflies neither of us had ever seen before. We are so glad that such a wonderful place has been preserved for all to enjoy and appreciate its uniqueness.

Can a fairly small area really harbor such an amazing diversity of butterfly species, and in such incredible numbers that at times it seems like every mistflower has a butterfly on it? It can. It does. Go see it!”

Ralph and Claudette Moore, U.S.



“I needed a holiday, a break, a retreat of sorts where I could lose myself, find somewhere where the surroundings could be so enchanting and absorbing that the stresses and concerns of the rest of my life could just fall away and evaporate.... Somewhere nature-driven, enchanting and invigorating, where I could refresh and re-energise. A place to reboot the mental hard drive. And what better a place than Emerald Valley in Honduras, hosted by Robert Gallardo and Olivia Dias...

I was brought up in the rain forest zone of Nigeria and fell in love with tropical butterflies there, a passion that has remained ever since. More recently I have lived and worked in other parts of Africa where my passion and knowledge developed. When I was young, we had all sorts of butterfly books in the house, so I was well aware of Morphos, Owls, Longwings, Clearwings, Crackers and so on from South and Central America.

I first came across Robert in around 2017 or so when he posted some photos of the crepuscular skippers he was finding in Emerald Valley in one of the butterfly groups on Facebook. I was interested, as they looked similar to the crepuscular ones we get in Africa, where I am most familiar. I was also intrigued by the way he was baiting them and the success he was getting with the bait. We hooked up on Facebook, and ever since then we have chatted about butterflies, and I was also able to see the growth of the house, guest lodge etc that Robert and Olivia built in Emerald Valley along with the ever-growing list of butterfly species they were finding there, especially after the discovery of the mist flowers on the property. It's a great story, and I was definitely interested in visiting.

In Autumn 2023 I sold my flat and moved out of London after over 30 years in the city, and when Robert said that he had a week's window during which I could visit, I pretty much bought a ticket to Honduras and jumped on a plane there and then.

Robert and Olivia picked me up at the airport in San Pedro, and we drove straight to Emerald valley with only a couple of brief stops for water etc. Then for 6 days, it was my home, just me, Robert, Olivia, Butch the dog and a load of birds and butterflies. A very comfortable guest bedroom with an en suite, great home cooking from Olivia, electricity and Wi-Fi on tap, and an amazing balcony overlooking various flowering bushes attracting all manner of butterflies and hummingbirds from dawn until dusk – all with a backdrop of towering walls of forest running up and down the steep limestone hills, with a sound track of forest birds, cicadas and the stream running nearby.

The area around the house that I walked around in was a mixture of virgin forest, secondary forest, domestic plants grown for birds and butterflies, some open areas, small fields and paths, and the remnants of old plots of coffee, banana, and sugar. This place is a model of re-wilding, and regeneration occurs quickly in the tropical climate of Central America. Sometimes Robert acted as a guide and showed me where to look and what to look for, other times, I wandered around on my own in a world of Neotropical butterflies.

Amongst the highlights of the visit was a dusk trip up to ‘Skipper Pass’ as Robert calls it; this is an area up a path through the forest to a pass between two hilltops which he has found to be a great place for the crepuscular skippers which frequent the area. We reached the relevant spot as light was fading; crepuscular skippers by their very nature are on the wing from around sundown onwards into early evening, and as we were under pretty much full canopy cover anyway, light was low. Hence, natural light photography was all but impossible for butterfly photography. The area along the ‘path’ was maybe 50 to 100m long, and Robert stuck bits of white tissue paper onto suitable leaves with saliva, and then sprayed them with the bait – a liquid mixture of fermented tuna (tinned) and urine. Within minutes, seconds even, skippers started to appear. It was an extraordinary thing, and I’m sure unique in the world of entomology; people have used baits all over the world, especially the topics, but I’d never heard of this. Over the course of maybe an hour and a half, we had up to two dozen specimens from at least 10 species. And some of these Hesperids are big –some *Bungalotis* species can have a wingspan of nearly 3 inches... It was amazing to see them appear from nowhere out of the dim light like little insect apparitions, and something that only Emerald Valley with Robert as your guide can currently offer.

Overall, I saw some amazing species, of all families locally extant, from Owls and Morphos through Swallowtails and Cattlehearts, Longwings and Clearwings to Metalmarks, Hairstreaks, giant Skippers and much more. Around 200 species photographed in 5 days plus many more seen — including finding the 730th Emerald Valley species. Emerald Valley does what it says on the tin, and I was truly immersed in the place from the moment I arrived.

If you want to spend a few days in an easy to access world of tropical butterflies, with a rainforest and re-wilding project on your doorstep — very literally — balanced with a comfortable ‘house’ with great hospitality, good food and mod cons, then I recommend you consider Emerald Valley.”

Jon Baker, U.K.



A few photos Jon wanted to share that he took during his stay at Emerald Valley. He was the first international guest to stay at Emerald Valley and experience the magic of Skipper Pass.



Dark-cheeked Ruby-eye (Bungalotis astylos)



Spotted Scarlet-eye (Bungalotis erythus)



Common Scarlet-eye (Nascus solon)

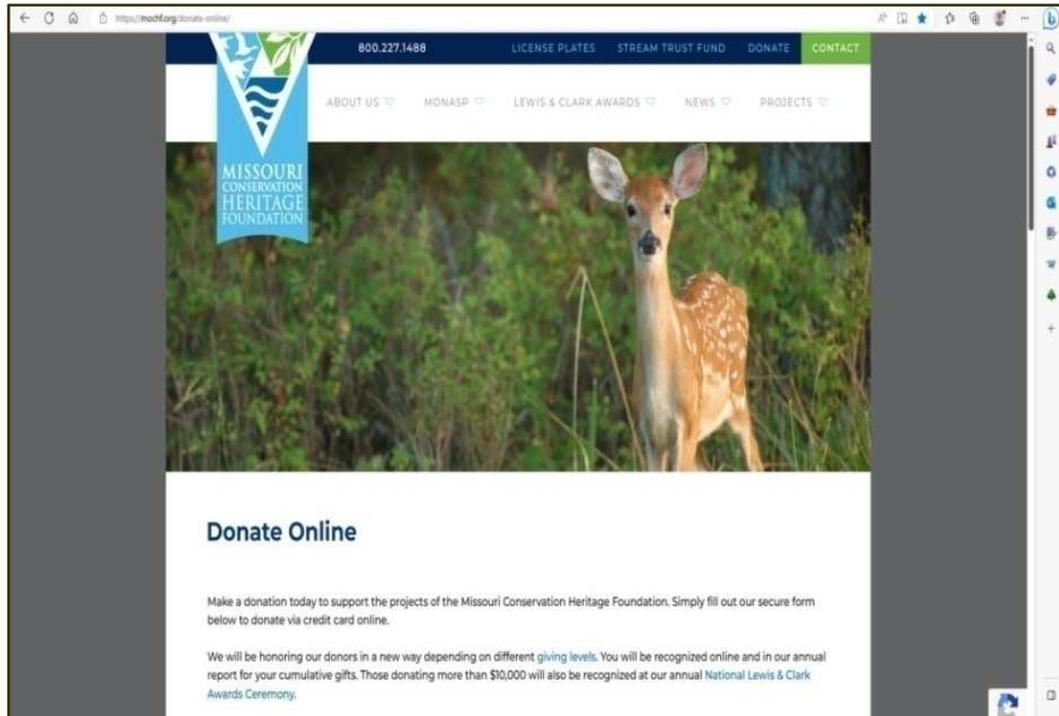


Green-backed Ruby-eye (Perichares adela)

Donations

Donations are gladly accepted anytime of the year. Past donations have been utilized to fund field research to remote parts of the country, fund particular projects at Emerald Valley, pay for environmental education efforts, buying bird books to give to public schools, paying for the participation of students when we offer natural history classes, and the purchasing of additional adjacent lands.

How to donate-Tax-deductible donations can be made through the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, a non-profit in the United States. Online donations can easily be made. First, enter the page <https://mochf.org/donate-online/>



Next, scroll down a bit until reaching the “Designation” bar. In the box “Wherever most needed” you will find us, ‘Friends of Emerald Valley in Honduras.’ After the selection there, continue down to complete the payment process.



Institutions and businesses that support our efforts.



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THANK YOU!