



Friends of Emerald Valley

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

JUNE - 2023



Photo by Alejandro Calderón

Letter from the Editor

For those of who have been to Honduras, you know that things really aren't as they appear. The U.S. State Dept. advisories make it sound like a crime-ridden, war-torn, and entirely unsafe place to visit. You know that is far from the truth.

This past February marked my having resided here for thirty years. I arrived as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer and never left. This is my home away from home. Living and working in these types of countries where political corruption and poverty are commonplace only means that its finite natural resources, environmental education, and sustainable nature tourism take a back seat. This has been the case in all my years here.

However, this is not to say that someone should not be trying to do something to at least curtail habitat loss and work on educating school children. We have been doing just that, to a somewhat lesser degree on a national level, and markedly here at Emerald Valley.

Olivia and I have resided at Emerald Valley since August 2015, after having built the house over a two-year period. With the help of friends we have been able to buy and conserve fifty acres of rich pre-montane rainforest, one of the most vulnerable habitats in the region. Little did we know that it would literally prove to be a treasure-trove, full of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

More international visitors are attending our annual butterfly festival (which has run for four consecutive years) and more people want to visit.

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



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 724 species, including one endemic, and was featured in the October 2022 issue of Tropical Lepidoptera. And we are almost finished with the first deluxe cabin, of which we hope to add a few more in the years to come.



Converting a Corn Field into a Dream

By Robert Gallardo

One could surmise that residing in the tropics could be 'living a dream' and may sound romantic, and it is, at least to some degree. But it also entails sacrifices and sometimes an endless list of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. I have sacrificed my adult life as a U.S. citizen to live and work in Honduras; a country where it is very difficult to accomplish just about anything. Nonetheless, this is the life I have chosen. To follow a dream of becoming a Naturalist in a tropical country. Having arrived in Honduras with Peace Corps may have been coincidental or it may be construed as an act of fate. To be placed in a country where so little had been done on its bird and butterfly life. To end up pioneering two completely different fields of fauna. Yes, it has been a Dream.

I met Olivia at a Christmas bird count in 2010 and from there the rest was history. We were living at a couple of temporary places around Lake Yojoa before finally deciding to find a place to buy and build a house. I had landed multiple contracts with U.S.A.I.D. as the lead instructor on training Honduras' fleet of bird watching guides. The first edition of the *Guide to the Birds of Honduras* was released in early 2015 and I had finally saved up enough money to make something happen. The stage was set.

We were in the market for a piece of rainforest. Not too close to anyone, nor not too far from a paved road. Close enough to be able to get electricity, internet, and water to the site. Might sound simple, but we knew that finding JUST THE RIGHT place was not going to be an easy task. And it wasn't. We searched and searched all around the Lake and nothing was turning up. We had numerous people helping us look for a piece of land and one who lived in Los Naranjos found something. The owner of the lot actually lived far away along the north coast, but we were able to get ahold of her and she came. We all met and drove up to the site. It was a large, forested hill located in the northwest corner of the Lake. It was perfect. A neighbor of hers (Jorge) was coincidentally there that day and thinking we would buy the place he let us know that he also had a piece of land for sale nearby if we were so inclined. The price was right, the place was big enough, and had all the potential we were looking for. Well, after all that effort, her older children (who lived nearby), convinced her not to sell (God forbid she sell their inheritance!). We were really bummed and just about to give up looking around the Lake when we remembered Jorge.



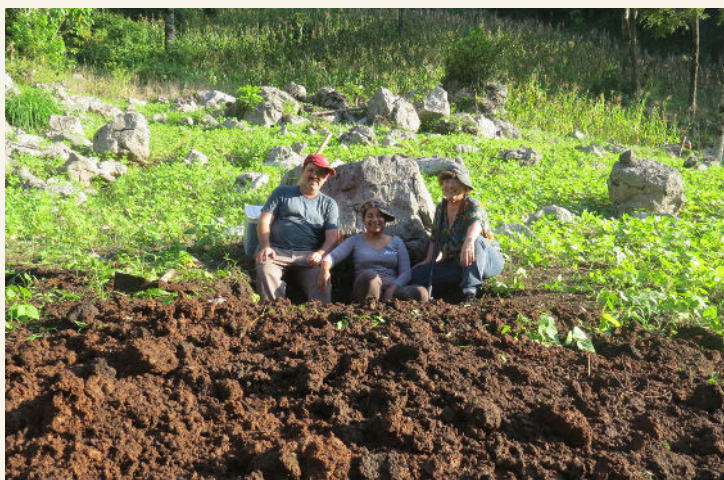
Oct. 31, 2015-Recently purchased land with bean field.

We found where he lived and let him know that we'd like to see the piece he was offering. Just up the paved road a bit and down a bumpy dirt road we came to the spot. It was almost an entirely closed-in canyon with tall, steep hills covered with rainforest. The narrow, flat area that he offered was planted in corn and beans. A plot he had lent to someone in the village. Well, it was the proverbial "love at first sight." Although Olivia seemed

apprehensive, I could envision something spectacular further down the road. There was literally nothing (man-made) there less a little concrete slab where a hut once stood and a lone water faucet. This first purchase would encompass about 14 acres. Sold! And so it began.

I allowed the villager to pick his crop of corn and beans. From there onward, we would let the forest regenerate on its own. By January 2016 we were already in action, lining up masons and workers, to start building the house. Several people worked on the first floor non-stop. I had also hired a contractor who was in charge of getting all the plans and permits in order to take electricity down into the valley. Once we had juice, I got to work on installing the second floor of the house, built entirely out of pressure-treated lumber. By August 2016 the house was livable, although the inside of the second floor and other details weren't finished. We were tired of renting places and having neighbors. We were ready to begin our dream.

Mom came down not long afterwards and cried when she saw the place. She could sense it too. The name the locals had of this little area was 'Plan del Amador' (lover's plains). It sounded romantic, but we wanted to choose something that was more fitting. A cute, little green toucan inhabits these woods; Emerald Toucanet. Aha! Emerald something + boxed-in canyon.



Nov. 2, 2015-Mom, Olivia and Robert. Digging a hole to put boulder in where the house will be built

Emerald Valley it was. Later on, we would change the name to Emerald Valley Nature Center which is what our place really is. But I wanted to take it up one more notch. By then, we had already begun running an annual butterfly festival and had just published a twenty-two page manuscript in the journal *Tropical Lepidoptera* that treated the amazing butterfly diversity of this property. At the time of the publication we had 704 species recorded. Today, we are at 724. So, a name change was in order. Recalling that there is a national butterfly center in the U.S., it seemed fitting that planet Earth needed an international butterfly center. And so it was: Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center.

So much has happened between the time we built the house and the writing of this first newsletter. With the help of friends we were able to purchase a larger, adjacent lot and an additional small lot across the rainwater gulley. The total acreage under our stewardship is now fifty acres.

In late 2017 I 'discovered' a magical plant behind the house called the Blue Mistflower. It would end up being the beginning of our annual butterfly festival and focus of special research. It would help us document so many country and property records. One year later I discovered our endemic butterfly (Ellie's Emesis) on those flowers. In January 2021 Robert Gilson with Fauna Ventures came down to check out our budding Festival. In January 2022 we welcomed our first international participants during the third butterfly festival; seven in all. In January 2023 we received fourteen international participants and two more well-known butterfly guides (David Geale and Fredy Montero) during our festival-conservation tour. We realized we had something good here and are so proud of the fact that we have the only event of its kind in all of Latin America.

With some donations from other friends and some neighbors we installed cement tracks on two-hundred yards of the entrance road. We no longer get stuck (literally) here during the rainy season.

Before Covid we were able to finish the second floor of the house. Part of it is our master bedroom. Our books and growing butterfly collection would also be stored there. During Covid we made significant progress on the butterfly book and even built a small meeting room.

In early 2022 we started building our first cabin up on the hillside behind the house and it is literally a stone's throw away from being completed.

In late 2022 we also finished the final draft of the *Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras*. This book took six years in the making and we are already working on a second edition with plans to publish it in perhaps another ten years. This *Illustrated Distributional Survey of the Butterflies of Honduras* will be my last publication. With more than 450 species still possible for Honduras, we have our work cut out for us.



Feb. 1, 2016-Starting to build the house.



Aug. 15, 2016-Mom, Olivia and Robert. Just after having moved into the house.



May 17, 2018-Mom and Robert with the banner she made.



Aug. 29, 2022-Several months after initiating construction of first cabin.



The day we received and installed our first signage

What's New at Emerald Valley

Since this is the first newsletter, we will keep the 'what's new' to what has transpired only this year.

First and foremost. We originally had named this site 'Emerald Valley Nature Center' which sounded good, but was kind of bla, so we decided to take it up a notch or two. Our current name was derived from the fact that this single, fifty acre site hosts the highest diversity of butterflies per hectare anywhere in the Neotropics. There are likely other similar sites, but published studies are not yet available. Although our research focuses primarily on butterfly monitoring, we do inventory plant and reptile life as well. We hope to someday build a small natural history museum on site which would include a herbarium and a separate room to house an insect collection.

Our endemic butterfly. As many of you may know, we found an undescribed species of butterfly in our mistflower gardens on January 1, 2019. This endemic species,



*Mom receiving a handmade, hand-painted bag
with her butterfly*

only known from Emerald Valley, was published in the June 2022 issue of Tropical Lepidoptera. Ellie's Emesis (*Emesis eleanorae*) was described and named in honor of my mother. At the early age of 11 she got me interested in

butterflies. Well, she had never got to actually see a living one until this year. We were both futzing around in the mistflower garden when I spotted a female. She got to where I was standing in time to see this beautiful little butterfly that will forever have her name. This was the only sighting of the species during the entire mistflower season.

Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival This past January we held the 4th annual Emerald Valley Butterfly festival. In 2022 we received the first-ever international participants and this year fourteen people came from Canada and the U.S. Along with an incredible turnout of national and international participants, the festival hosted three additional expert butterfly guides. Fredy Montero came from Colombia, David Geale from Canada, and Robert Gilson from the U.S. It was star lineup and we are so grateful for their participation. We had young kids actively participating in photographing butterflies in the garden and they had a blast. Smaller children from the nearby village of La Union Suyapa came to see the butterflies and participate in coloring them. Allan attended them and did a wonderful job. And on top of that. The butterflies made an absolutely spectacular showing this year. A total of nearly 320 species were recorded during the five day event and included a couple of country records. We are positive that 1,000's of photographs were taken and the participants left with fond memories and many Lifer butterflies. We are currently planning on expanding to a second, terraced mistflower garden for next years' event. A collage of photos can be seen at the end of this newsletter



View of the nearly finished cabin.

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 bird, butterfly, and mammal-friendly gardens. Ever since hunting has been stopped, we are seeing an increase in small mammal populations.

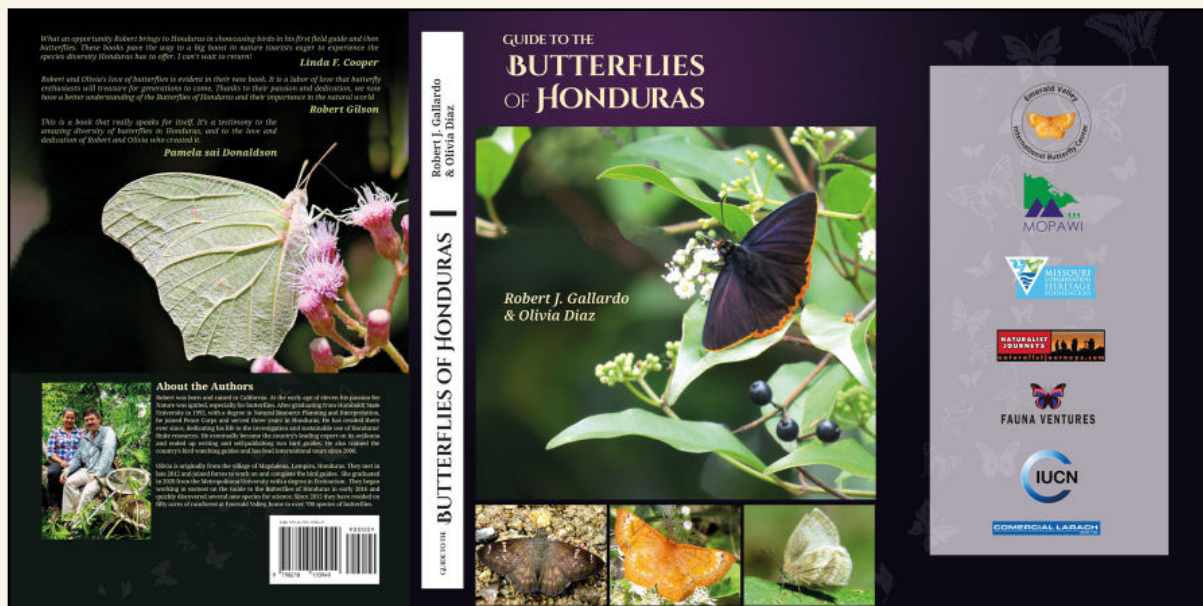
2-3 groups of coatis now roam the property and will sometimes come close to feed on ripening bananas. More agoutis are also being seen and now have evidence of ocelot along the upper slopes. Hordes of oropendolas and other birds come in to feed on fruiting melastome shrubs. Dazzling hummingbird feed 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 call at night and chachalacas may wake you at dawn, but no human produced sounds will bother.

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. Contact us for details.

Upcoming Activities, Events, etc.

On June 17th Emerald Valley will host the official ceremony to celebrate the publication of Honduras' first butterfly guide. After completing six years of field research, Robert and Olivia are publishing the first edition of this photographic guide.



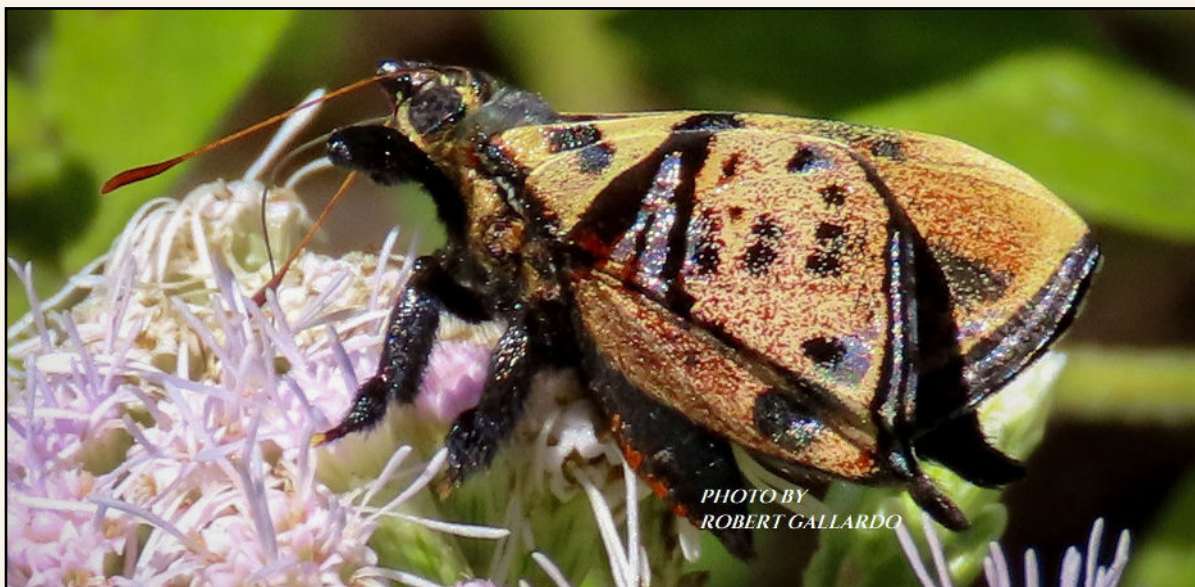
Front and back cover of the forthcoming book

It will represent the only book of its kind in Latin America in that it will feature all six families for a single country and include text for each species. Doing this literally from scratch was a monumental task and they (along with other local contributors) were able to add more than 400 country records in this short period of time. However, more than 470 species could likely occur in the country and they will continue to carry out field work with the hopes of producing a more complete second edition in a decade or so.

Research News

Robert and Olivia have been monitoring the mistflower gardens for more than five years, mostly in search of country records and other rare species. To date, they have recorded a total of 360 species that nectar on these flowers. This represents half of all species recorded at Emerald Valley. This year, for the first time, they started a more

intense monitoring program to begin to ascertain how many species are attracted in a single season and the results were extraordinary. A total of 303 species were documented, including several country record. The 'mistflower power' phenomenon (as we like to call it) was already noted in the October 2022 publication, but we are



planning to *The undescribed Ourocnemis metalmark.* continue the intense monitoring in order to publish another article that will solely treat these flowers.

During the recent monitoring we added many property records which included the discovery of an undescribed metalmark that was found by another collector along the north coast many years ago. He never bothered to contact and work with scientists to describe and publish it. This spectacular Ourocnemis metalmark represents the northernmost range of that genus. Unfortunately, after carefully photographing it on the flowers, it took off and never came back. Maybe in another five years one will return!

Featured Flora and Fauna

In each issue we will highlight special species of flora and fauna that have been documented at Emerald Valley.

Bird-For this first issue we had to feature the bird for which Emerald Valley was named after; the Emerald Toucanet (*Aulacorhynchus prasinus*). This lovely, small, green toucan is typically a resident of highland forest habitats. They feed on many different fruits as well as insects. Like other toucans, they likely take eggs or chicks from other bird nests to provide protein for their chicks during the nesting season. They nest in small cavities, often holes dug out by woodpeckers or where a branch had broken off a tree trunk. There are numerous pairs in and around the property. Their call is reminiscent of a barking dog. They are most frequently seen as they fly across the ravine or while feeding in a fruiting tree.

Butterfly-This first issue must highlight its endemic butterfly; Ellie's Emesis (*Emesis eleanorae*). When we first started monitoring the few mistflowers that were growing in the backyard (not really a garden yet) we documented country record after country record. While I was in the garden I noticed this brightly colored metalmark that did not match up with anything the Glassberg book. I photographed and collected it. Then another different one showed up. I did the same. It turned out to be the male/female pair. I sent photos to different experts and they all agreed that it was an undescribed species. It took three years to undertake the necessary scientific work and finally get it published.

This species is often noted only once or twice a year, and primarily during the mistflower blooming season. It likely inhabits the canopy where it goes unnoticed. Its larval food plant is unknown.



Emesis eleanorae RD-PA-0429



A nesting Emerald Toucanet

Testimonials

In each issue we will strive to 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.





KEVIN & MARTA BARTLETT

USA

“ **Supporting Dreams: Why Emerald Valley is Important**

I'm writing here on behalf of my wife Marta, and myself, as active supporters of the evolving project at Emerald Valley, Honduras. As a keen birder, with a Honduran partner, I first met Robert on a family-based visit to the country, when I was looking for a birding guide. My search led me to the book, *Guide to the Birds of Honduras*, the only field guide dedicated solely to this bird-rich country, and to its author, Robert Gallardo. During a successful birding trip, I learned not only that Robert was an outstanding guide, but also that he was a man with a dream.

Robert is a man with 'big goals'. These include transforming eco-tourism and sustainability in Honduras, influencing 'authorities' to protect precious natural resources, and training young Hondurans as eco-guides. In summary, a dream of making a major contribution to the Honduran economy and protecting the country's precious wildlife at the same time.

As St. Exupery reminds us, 'A goal without a plan is just a wish'. Robert is a 'man with a plan'. He knew that people will not value the wildlife of Honduras unless they know what resources the country has, and can learn about them. This understanding drove the years of tireless work from Robert, now supported by his equally dedicated partner Olivia, to create the field guides to the birds, and then the butterflies, of Honduras.

He knew that he would need a base, and a model, so Robert took the major personal risk of acquiring what has now become the Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center. Marta and I became involved with the Project when the opportunity arose

to expand the property and thus increase its impact. We are both career-long educators, and therefore, by definition, not wealthy. Even with our limited resources, we decided to make what felt like a very significant financial contribution to this Project, in support of its expansion.

For us the decision, if not simple, was very significant. We love wild places and wild things and we have a deep affection for the marvelous country that is Honduras. Very few people have the vision, passion, skills, and drive to do what Robert and Olivia are doing for this country. Those of us who share their vision, but whose lives are packed with our own projects and pre-occupations, have another way to have an impact. We can support these rare individuals who never take a break from making their dream a reality. We can share the dream, believe in the dreamers and we can help make it happen. I hope others will join Marta and me in making the dream of Emerald Valley a secure and sustained success, on behalf of people, birds, butterflies, and other non-human inhabitants of this remarkable ecosystem."



KARL & ELISE BARRY

USA

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Karl and I attended the 2023 Butterfly Festival at Emerald Valley. We had contributed to the publication of the first edition of the Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras and wanted to see the roots of its origins. It was an enlightening, exciting experience. It is astonishing how much effort was put into making Emerald Valley the destination that it is! To have a place that attracts so many species of butterflies and that nurtures other insects, flora, mammals, or anything from nature is a blessing for Honduras, ecotourism and the world!

It's wildly inspiring to realize that in Robert and Olivia's first six years of field work, they documented over 300 country records and discovered numerous undescribed species, and that while they were doing this, they were also building the structures and gardens of Emerald Valley, and conducting education classes and workshops, some of which have created graduates that 'have gone on to form their own micro-businesses and/or be avitourism guides internationally. Investing in their efforts is an easy, worthy, and rewarding decision. The world needs many more people like Robert and Olivia! We are eagerly looking forward to the Illustrated Distributional Survey of the Butterflies of Honduras and wish Emerald Valley in all its endeavors to continue to be the huge success that it is!"



LINDA COOPER

USA

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“When Emerald Valley photos started popping up on my Facebook feed a couple of years ago, I was immediately drawn in by the numbers of butterflies being seen in this small Honduran valley near Lake Yojoa. Hmmm, I had never traveled to Honduras. I had never even thought about traveling there but with all those butterflies why wouldn't I go? Luckily, Fauna Ventures offered a tour package and I signed up.

Robert and Olivia are creating an eco-paradise welcoming visitors to Emerald Valley and hosting Central America's only butterfly festival - Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival. 2023 was the fourth year of the festival and the year I attended. I had watched the butterfly gardens progress unfold through Robert's Facebook posts and knew that January is the perfect time for maximum mistflower blooms and the opportunity for seeing many tropical butterflies. I had drooled over previous years' butterfly festival photos by attendees and the hosts. There were butterflies everywhere - just about every size, shape, color and form. I was not disappointed.

Emerald Valley is approximately 6/10s of a mile down a rough unpaved road. Robert's 4-wheel drive truck is set up to transport visitors. This is the same trusty Toyota truck that has hauled in all the building materials to build everything you see in Emerald Valley. The road is also walk able where butterflies can be seen that may not be found in the garden. The more I think about what they have let Nature restore to their land and have built under difficult circumstances, the more admiration I have for this amazing couple.

Once in the gardens, visitors can walk on the tiered paths, visit the numerous fruit feeders favored by some butterflies, walk the shady jungle trails or sit on Robert

and Olivia's covered porch where bananas are within easy reach. Different flowering plants attract a nice variety of hummingbirds. Honestly, I came away amazed not only by the butterflies, but also by the warmth and hospitality of our hosts, Robert and Olivia and their families. A permanent pole-barn structure for outdoor events and food-serving area has now been completed. You will enjoy homemade Honduran meals in this new open structure. A bathroom facility with running water is available. A screened shelter for leaving backpacks and re-charging batteries and devices and picking up wholesome snacks is convenient. Work is almost finished on the guest house. I can't wait to return for an extended stay in Emerald Valley with their book *Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras* firmly in one hand and camera or binoculars in the other."



CAYDEE SAVINELLI

USA

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I first encountered Robert when he presented his work with butterflies to the Carolina Butterfly Society in 2022. What impressed me was that on his own, both he and Olivia set out to record butterflies in Honduras while finding new country records and new species. Having this type of information is invaluable for naturalists and scientists as we try to understand what is happening to insects on our planet.

I have also had the good fortune to tour Honduras with Robert and Olivia via Robert Gilson and Fauna Ventures Butterfly Tours on two occasions. This past January, I visited Emerald Valley where Robert and Olivia have their home amongst the butterflies and other wildlife. There is so much to explore there, and each day brought new delights with different butterflies. It is a true eco-conservation location designed to preserve and study the butterflies while giving back to society including the local youth. For me, it is like living in a dream. Thank you, Robert and Olivia, for your great work.



TRICIA BURKHARDT

USA

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“The Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation is honored to be a long-term partner with the Robert Gallardo and the Friends of Emerald Valley. From working with them on the Birds of Honduras guidebook to the Butterflies of Honduras guidebook, we greatly appreciate all their hard work protecting Honduras’ rich natural heritage. Their efforts to educate the people in Honduras and around the world about the area’s rich biodiversity levels and the need to protect these wildlife populations has far-reaching effects. They are truly dedicated to our beautiful natural world, and we hope you join us in supporting their work.”



Exequiel and family

EXEQUIEL URQUIA

Honduras

“We knew that in Honduras there were 31 valleys, but to our surprise we came to find out about Emerald Valley, a new place in the country, replete with birds and butterflies. Where the sounds of crickets and cicadas fill the night air. This is the 32nd precious valley in Honduras.

We celebrated Katrina's birthday there, not knowing that we would be enchanted by this charming place. The great food, delicious cheesecake (prepared by Olivia), and friendly conversation were all enjoyed, as well as a pleasant campfire after a sunset. We felt like family and laughed a lot. That was in August 2021.

Since then, we have returned many times: to send our children to various workshops on birds, butterflies and plants, to the annual butterfly festival, or just to escape the noise of the industrial city. The sound of the Little Tinamou always greets us with a Welcome. Robert and Olivia are the guardians of Emerald Valley, with profound knowledge about its flora and fauna, and always enjoy sharing with those who wish to learn. They demonstrate the beauty that surrounds them which, at first, may not seem like anything special but is an oasis of coexistence between people and nature, of which we are part of.”



WILS & DAVID

USA

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“My husband, David Szetela and I heard about a Butterfly Festival to Emerald Valley in Honduras from a friend on Facebook. Since we are both fascinated by butterflies and have built a butterfly garden at our home in Florida, we were excited to have the opportunity to see the butterflies of Honduras since there are so many species there. Since Robert Gallardo and his partner Olivia Diaz, the hosts of the festival, were publishing the quintessential book that documents over 1,200 species of butterflies of Honduras, we wanted to go there and experience seeing and photographing them. The festival was magical! It was amazing to be there amidst hundreds of butterflies flying from flower to flower in the gardens created by Robert and Olivia. We were mesmerized by the swirling colors and learned so much about how to identify them from our tour mates.

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The accommodations were clean and comfortable in rustic cabins, and the food was fresh, locally sourced, and delicious. We enjoyed fresh fish from the lake, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Olivia made us a pineapple cheesecake from fresh pineapple that was divine. The Honduran people were very kind and friendly. We felt very safe. I was so happy to see that children from the nearby town are welcomed at the butterfly gardens to learn about butterflies because I had brought some fun press-on tattoos with me, and the children loved getting them.

If you want to experience a truly unique vacation in a natural environment, this is a must!



ALISON SMITH

USA

“My first trip to Central America was to the Emerald Valley for the annual butterfly festival in 2022. Upon arrival I knew immediately that I'd landed in an ecologically rich part of the world, which for someone who enjoys all aspects of the natural world, was like being plopped down in paradise. Having studied butterflies in my home state of South Carolina for some years, I was awestruck by the diversity, beauty, and number of species in Honduras. Although this was a butterfly festival, a huge bonus for many of us was the diversity of birdlife there too.

One of the elements that makes this trip a stand-out is the expertise of the local hosts, Robert Gallardo and Olivia Diaz, the professional guides, as well as the warmth and hospitality of the local Hondurans. Every effort is made to ensure that travelers see butterflies in various locations and habitats, that all questions are answered, and that guests experience local culture and cuisine. Each time I've visited I've experienced camaraderie and developed friendships with fellow travelers and Hondurans. This, combined with a topnotch educational scientific experience, is a trip that butterfly enthusiasts will treasure. In fact, I returned this past year in 2023 and intend to make it an annual event.”



MARION SEAMAN

USA-Honduras

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“Emerald Valley is a place I’ll never forget. The diversity was mind-boggling and I was told that it’s even more intense at other times of the year. In a couple of hours, we saw 20+ species of birds, an assortment of butterflies....a wild animal show with hungry coatis stripping a banana tree...all with dramatic backdrop of nearly vertical mountainsides carpeted in trees and covered in dense understory foliage. But that’s only part of the story. Robert and Olivia have an incredible passion for conserving this magical place and its inhabitants, which shows in everything they do. Emerald Valley keeps popping up in my travel dreams-a return visit is at the top of my list.”



MATT KLEIN

USA

“I participated in the Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival in January 2022. It was an incredible experience from beginning to end and I haven't stopped thinking about it since I left. It was my first dedicated butterflying trip outside of the United States and it will be difficult to top. The group saw over 250 species of butterflies, and I personally photographed 165. The rich landscape provided ample opportunities for bird watching as well, and our group started every day with a bird walk. Of course, once you are in the mistflower gardens it is difficult to pay attention to the birds (and I say this as a former birder-first nature enthusiast) because the butterflies provide non-stop action and demand your attention.

During our time in Honduras, we had the benefit of incredible guides – Robert Gallardo, of course, and Robert Gilson of Fauna Ventures. These are world-class butterfly experts and also incredible people. They always put the tour members first, often sacrificing an opportunity to capture the “perfect shot” in order to ensure that the group had an opportunity to see whichever spectacular butterfly they may have found. And, their joy and passion at finding butterflies is contagious. I can remember the buzz I felt after a long day in Emerald Valley, relaxing over cold drinks, as we talked about all the incredible finds we had that day. And this happened every night because each day brought something new and exciting to see. Robert and Olivia were exceptional hosts, not only providing access to their incredible surroundings in Emerald Valley but also providing exceptionally delicious meals and desserts (thank you, Olivia!). I can't wait to return in January 2024. I already booked my flight and am counting down the days! “



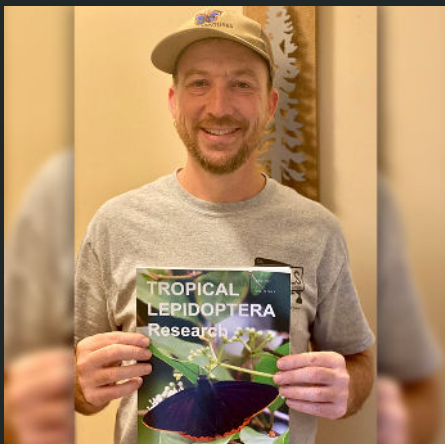
DEB MARSH

USA

“I met Robert in April of 2022 on my first trip to Honduras and could hardly believe his descriptions of Emerald Valley. It almost sounded too good to be true. But when I arrived there in January of 2023 for the Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival, I realized that he hadn't exaggerated at all. What an amazing place, and I feel so fortunate that I was able to experience the amazing diversity of butterflies, birds, and plants on the property. I probably barely scratched the surface though.

With a great deal of hard work Robert and Olivia have created a very special place to relax, unwind, and appreciate the biological bounty of the rainforest. Their gracious and friendly hospitality is a very special part of the experience. The sunny mistflower gardens during my January visit were incredible. Butterflies were so varied and numerous that I hardly knew where to look first. When I had had enough sun, trails through the forest were a welcome change and provided great looks at different butterflies that were attracted to fruit baits. I didn't expect to see so many of these large forest butterflies and they proved to be real highlights for me.

Emerald Valley is located near other excellent butterfly and birding spots near Lake Yojoa such as Bio Parque Preserve and Cerro Azul Meambar. I can't imagine that there is anywhere else one can find so much variety in such close proximity. I certainly hope to return!”



ROBERT GILSON

USA

“

A Hidden Gem in the Heart of Honduras

“As the owner of Fauna Ventures, a butterfly tour company, I can’t help but marvel at the dedication and vision that Robert has put into Emerald Valley. I first discovered Emerald Valley during a conversation with Robert in the Fall of 2020. Little did I know, after my initial visit the following year, it would become an annual pilgrimage for me and my clients.

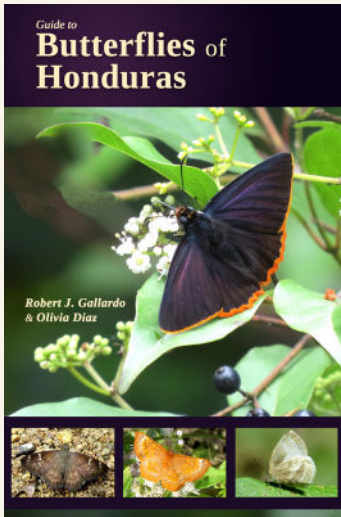
The moment you step onto the property, you’re transported to a captivating world filled with rare species of butterflies, birds, and other fauna. The pristine landscapes provide an unparalleled opportunity for nature lovers of all kinds.

The incredible biodiversity documented on the property was a significant aspect of my unforgettable experience at Emerald Valley. Robert’s incredible work in developing and maintaining this wonderful destination has made it easier than ever for people to experience the grandeur of the tropics without sacrificing comfort or modern amenities.

The best part? My clients adore Emerald Valley! Its beauty has captivated them so much that several have returned for multiple visits. Each time, they leave with cherished memories and a newfound appreciation for the importance of conservation.

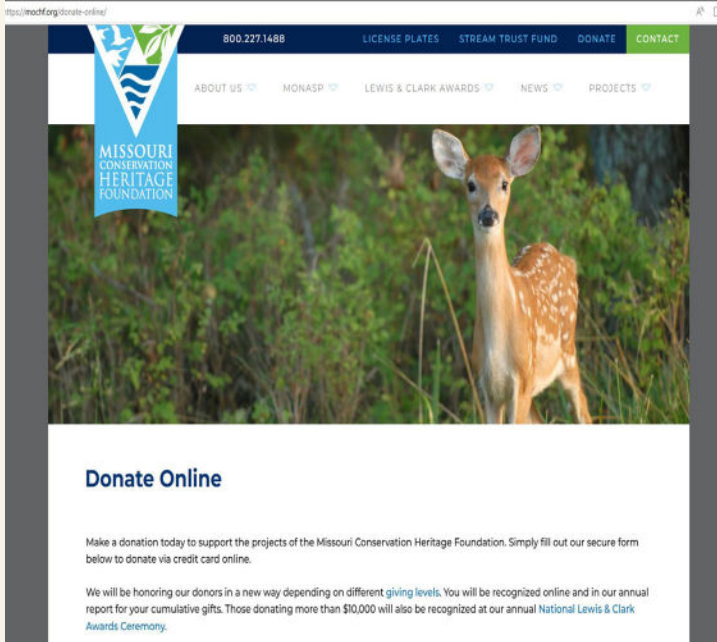
So, if you’re looking for an unforgettable adventure with your friends or family that brings you closer to nature, I wholeheartedly recommend Emerald Valley. Take my word for it – once you’ve experienced the enchantment of this wildlife sanctuary, you’ll be longing to return for years to come!”

Where to find our Butterfly Book



The Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras is available in North America through Fauna Ventures. Enter [STORE - Fauna Ventures Butterfly Tours](#) for more info on how to acquire a copy. In the UK, it is available with NHBS books. Enter [Guide to the Butterflies of Honduras | NHBS Field Guides & Natural History](#) for more info.

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,

<https://mochf.org/donate-online/>

and the purchasing of additional adjacent lands. We are currently looking into the possibility of installing a small natural history museum in conjunction with the Pro Nature Honduras Foundation (of which we are both founding members).

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.

We will be honoring our donors in a new way depending on different [giving levels](#). You will be recognized online and in our annual report for your cumulative gifts. Those donating more than \$10,000 will also be recognized at our annual [National Lewis & Clark Awards Ceremony](#).

Donation

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50

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Does your employer match gifts?
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A check can also be sent to them at:

P.O. Box 366
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102 -0366

Be sure to note on the check that it is for Friends of Emerald Valley.

Robert & Olivia



Robert & Olivia

Managers of Emerald Valley
rgallardo32@gmail.com

Sponsors



Butterfly Festival - January 2023

