



Friends of
Emerald Valley

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

June 2024



Photo by Alejandra Calderón

Letter from the Editor

Greetings again, to all our Friends of Emerald Valley. We are delighted to be circulating the third newsletter, thereby letting everyone know of what's new and upcoming here.

As hoped, we are still feeling 'growing pains,' and on many fronts. And the best thing about moving forward is that much of it is a direct result of *your* continued support. Life in the middle of the rainforest is often difficult, but our minds are often put at ease knowing that there are so many people who help us in so many ways. And when people come to visit and stay with us, it makes us even happier! Other than us just seeing all these wonderful birds and butterflies, we really like people to come and see for themselves.

We started off the New Year with a big bang, celebrating the fifth annual Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival. We had a great turnout of butterfly aficionados during the event, as well as visitors before and after. Our first guests from across the Atlantic also came to see our butterflies. We recorded many property and/or country record butterflies, many by the keen eyes of Harlin Maldonado. We initiated the construction of the first duplex cabin. We finally finished building the upper terraced butterfly garden and a small nursery where we will propagate our flowering plants. And even bigger news, is that we have began to acquire additional adjacent properties in conjunction with the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation's matching grant and your donations.

A lot of exciting news to share with everyone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "B.J. Seed", followed by a long horizontal flourish line extending to the right.

p.s.-If it seems like parts of the newsletter is a bit heavy on butterflies, well, it is. We are, after all, an International Butterfly Center!

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 should be and to 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 755 species. Our eco-lodge is slowly growing so guests can come and stay.



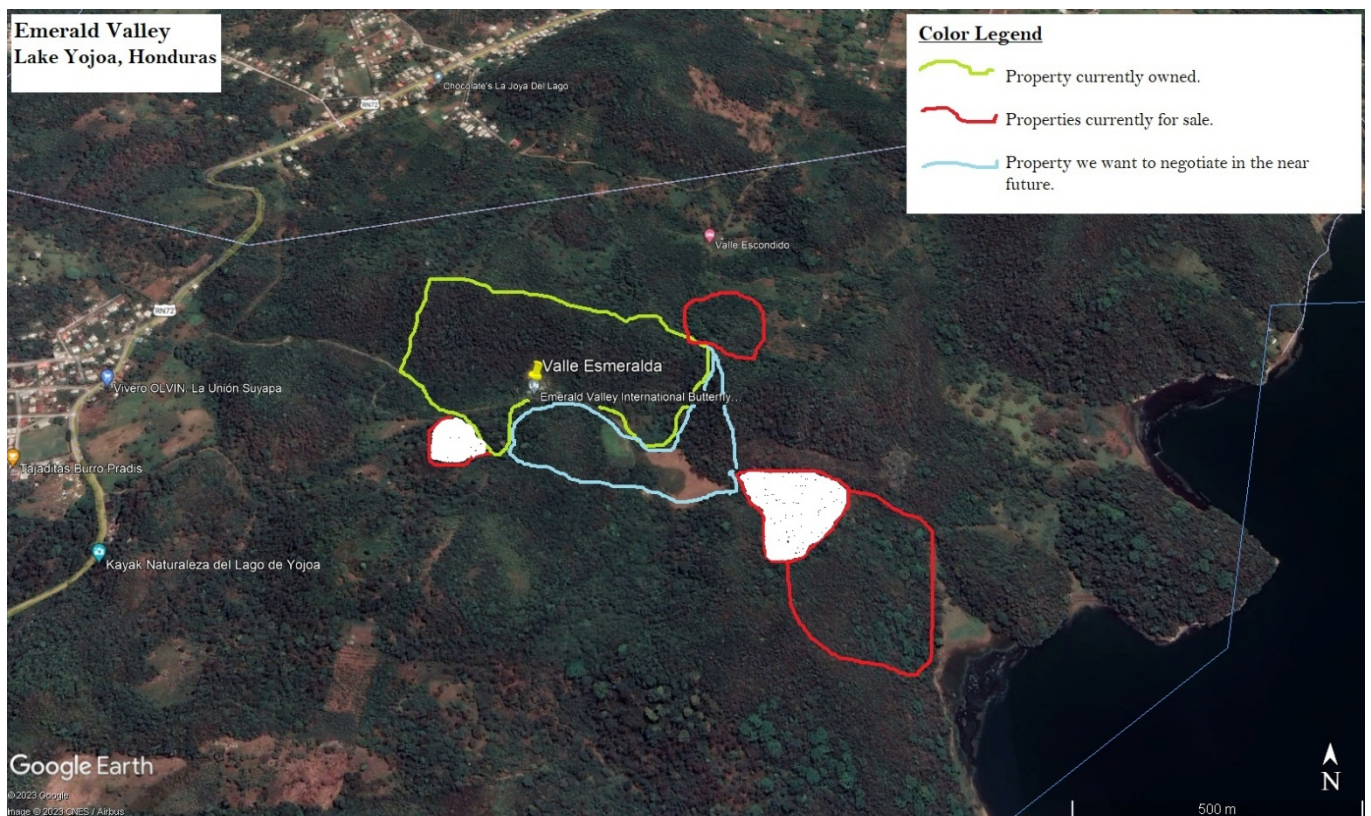
*Drone view of a part of Emerald Valley, taken from above Enchanted Peak.
Photo courtesy of Yasser Alejandro*

What's New at Emerald Valley

As mentioned in the cover letter, there is A LOT that is new at Emerald Valley.

Expanding Limits

First and foremost, we are ecstatic to announce that the original boundaries of fifty acres are now expanding. Thanks to the continued cooperation of the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MOCHF) who generously approved a \$10,000 grant, along with many personal donations (totaling nearly \$20,000), we are now in the process of acquiring two additional, adjacent lots. The larger lot measures 12.5 acres and the smaller one nearly 3 acres. These areas are depicted in white in the Google image below. The larger lot is a mixture of partly forested, rocky slopes and an abandoned coffee farm. This entire lot will be left to regenerate naturally. Sources of seed from the surrounding forests and natural dispersion from birds will aid in a quick recovery of natural forest. The smaller lot is located on a steep slope and is covered with large trees. The only large Balsa tree in the area is located there.



Google Earth view of the northwest corner of Lake Yojoa. The white shaded areas are the two properties currently being purchased.



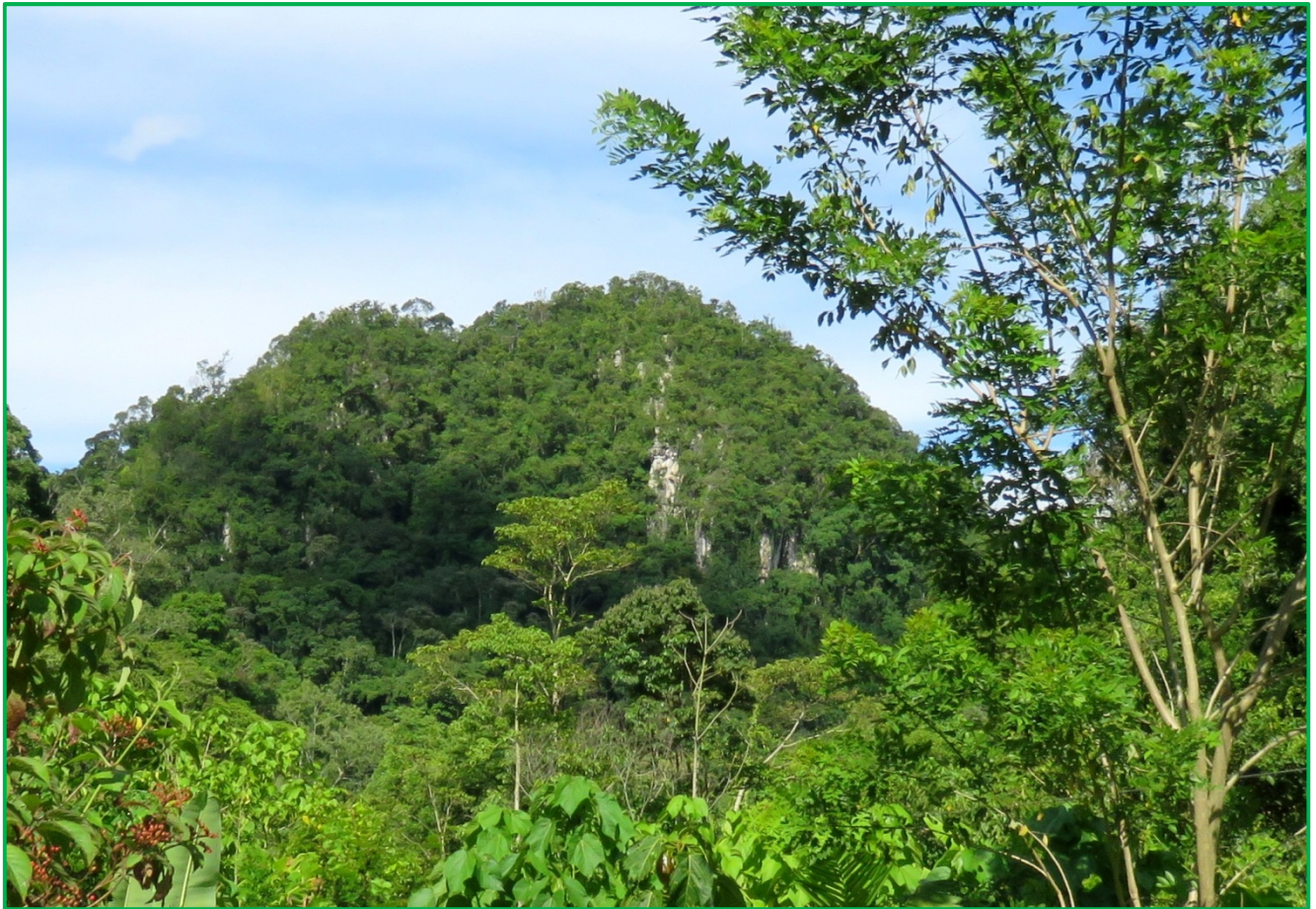
View of Lake Yojoa from the 12.5 acre property being purchased.

View of the front side of the 3-acre lot being purchased.

These two lots are costing \$21,000. Funds remaining in the Friends of Emerald Valley account will be carried over to the next fiscal year and utilized for purchasing additional properties.



A third land owner recently approached us (Jorge, who sold us the first lot where the house now stands) with a desire to sell his portion of Enchanted Peak. This is the limestone spire that stands to the east of the house, between us and Lake Yojoa. The process of officially measuring the lot with municipal land surveyors will likely commence within the next month or two. The 12.5-acre lot being purchased is located at the base, to the right, and below this spire.



A view of Enchanted Peak from the house.

We also plan on submitting an application for a matching grant with MOCHF for the next fiscal year in the hopes of acquiring one of two larger lots. We will continue to seek and accept donations for land acquisition until lots are no longer available.

We do know that wildlife has benefited enormously from protection measures of the existing properties. Putting up signs and our presence alone has deterred all poaching on the current properties. Populations of some mammals such as Ocelot, Paca, Coatimundi, Gray Fox, and Agoutis are rebounding, with young now being seen in some mammals. Toucan and parrot nests are no longer raided for the pet trade. Animals are also slowly becoming tamer. And to the best of our knowledge, we have the only active program in the country where landowners are purchasing properties for strict conservation purposes.

5th Annual Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival

From January 9-15, we held our annual butterfly festival, and in some ways it turned out to be the biggest event ever. An optional extension was offered that ran up to the 18th. As per our usual schedule, we visited Meambar N.P. on the first day, the Bio Parque Paradise reserve on the second day, and the remainder of the days at Emerald Valley. Unlike previous years, however, we had full sun every single day. Although our group of international participants was small this year, we made up for it with the sheer volume of butterflies and species that were documented.

On the way up to Meambar N.P. we stopped along the road to see what was stirring and found a lovely, and cooperative, Banded Tigerwing (*Aeria eurimedia*). In the park itself we put out some rotting banana along the trails in the hopes that it would bring in some interesting butterflies. And it did. The lovely Rusted Clearwing-Satyr (*Cithaerias pireta*) came, this being the only place where we could see this lovely species during the event. Atop the tower itself, we placed some banana on a railing and a spectacular male Aureola Leafwing (*Memphis aureola*) came in and perched.

The following day was spent at Bio Parque Paradise, a private reserve where we always find some great butterflies. Right off the bat, we found a country record Subrufescens Skipper (*Vertica subrufescens*) right on the other side of the main bridge. In a mistflower garden we found a gorgeous male White-banded Metalmark (*Hypophylla sudias*) and many participants were able to photograph it. But perhaps the best find was a pair of female Silvered Ruby-eyes (*Lycas argentea*) feeding on Porterweed. By the end of this second day we were already compiling an impressive species list.



Group photo at Bio Parque Paradise.

The following three days were spent at Emerald Valley where the butterflies shone bright. It ended up being perhaps the best turnout of species ever during the event. We were still at the cusp of the height of the mistflower bloom and the butterflies were barely starting to arrive in good numbers. However, numerous Black Sage shrubs were blooming and some Bitter Vine as well, which helped bring in yet more species. The turnout at the fruit feeders this year was spectacular and we even had several Stub-tailed Morphos (*Morpho theseus*) show up. Property records seen during the event included a knockout male Glorious Blue-Skipper (*Paches loxus*) spotted by Exequiel in the upper terraced garden. He came down with a photo of it on his cell phone, so we all went rushing up there. It was already gone! Then, someone down below yelled out that it was by the garage. Down we went, and there it was. What a find! A female Tropical Leafwing (*Anaea aidea*) showed up at the upper fruit feeders and a dainty Black-edged Euselasia (*Pelolasia cataleuca*) popped in by the dining area one morning right when everyone was arriving. To top everything off, was the sighting of a recently hatched male Ellie's Emesis (*Emesis eleanorae*), a species endemic to Emerald Valley. A small group of children were down from the village that day and also got to see it. We couldn't have asked for more this year.

A few participants stayed on for the extension when we spent an additional three days at Emerald Valley. According to the ongoing study we are conducting, an average of ten new species is detected each day in the mistflower gardens alone. These few extra days spent in the gardens are a sure way to add even more species to one's list.

After the festival, and weeks after reviewing everyone's photos, we accumulated an amazing 400 species. Although we can never guess how many species will be seen during the festival, it's fairly obvious that we are getting more species each year. The great food, fun companionship, short drives, and the overwhelming amount of butterflies seen are making our festival known around the globe.

A collage of festival photos can be seen at the end of the newsletter.

Group photo at Emerald Valley.



A New Cabin on the Way

In the last Newsletter we featured the first cabin that was completed; a Deluxe. Quite a few guests have come and stayed to enjoy this natural, tropical splendor. Two cousins, on mom's side of the family, came and stayed for two weeks. An American-Honduran family came around Christmas time. Two separate gentleman from England came and were immersed in the butterflies. A couple from Canada came prior to a scheduled tour with Naturalist Journeys. Some of their testimonials follow.

Many want to return. Seeing that we have a special place to share with the world, we have decided to build a small eco-lodge. The goal is to have a total of six rooms and a proper restaurant. It will be enough to bring in small groups and explore the species-rich Lake Yojoa region. Over 500 species of birds are found in the area and no less than 850-900 butterflies.

Literally, right after the butterfly festival ended we initiated construction of the first duplex cabin. This will be situated close to the deluxe cabin with a green wall of vegetation in between them. Due to the cabin's layout, we had to cut into the hillside and install a retaining wall, but by the beginning of March we had already put in the wooden pillars. At the time of this writing we had already installed the roofing of the decks. Each room will have two beds, private bath, and a covered deck overlooking the rainforest. We hope to have at least one of the rooms completed and ready to use by the end of this year.



Top Left-cleaning area where cabin will be built.

Above-Installing the posts.

Left-Walls completed.





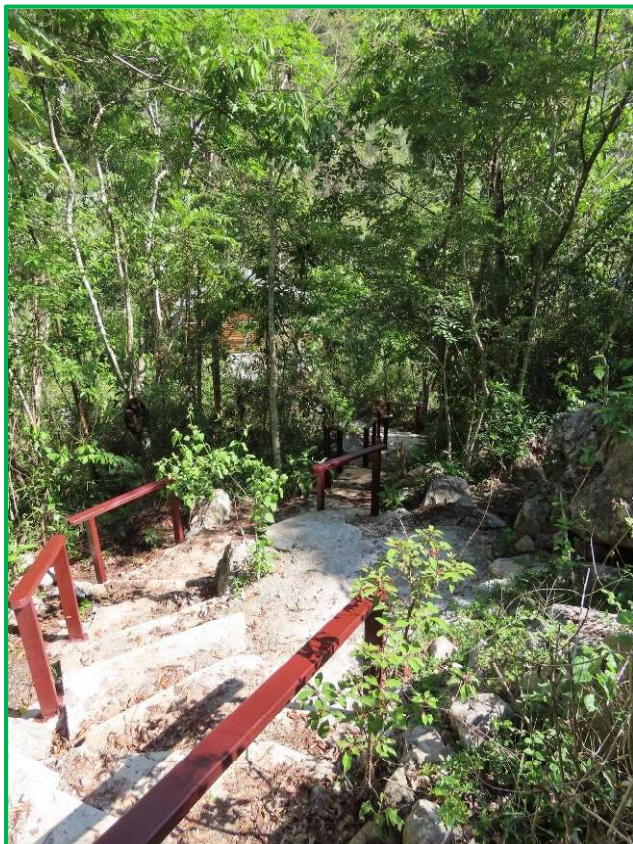
Beginning to install the roofing for the individual decks.

Upper Terraced Garden Finished

For the past four years we have been working on a terraced butterfly garden that sits just above the deluxe cabin. It has been an ambitious project as it is situated on a steep hillside amidst a field of large limestone boulders. We began by planting a lot of mistflowers and some Porterweed that we had propagated, and they all grew quickly. We then had the year when there was an outbreak of butterfly larvae (*Actinote anteus*) that literally wiped out a bunch of the mistflower plants. In late 2023 we began installing cement steps and walkways and completed about half of the project. Part of the garden was accessible during the 2024 butterfly festival and some great butterflies were seen there, some of which that were not seen in the main mistflower garden below. By May of this year we finished with the cement trails and handrailing along the entire route. The garden also has other native plants that attract birds and butterflies. This area will now provide yet another spot where visitors can search for more butterflies.



Left and below-July 2020. Initiating the new garden amidst a field of limestone boulders. Corn used to be grown at this spot.



Above and right-May 2024. Terraced garden finished.



Plant Nursery Finished

For quite some time we have been reproducing plants with cuttings, mostly with rooting hormone. But we can honestly admit that it has not been carried out the way it really should be; in a more organized manner. As we continue to expand the butterfly gardens and build cabins, we will need more plants that benefit both the birds and butterflies. It is easy to just let Nature grow and take its course but we also like to have ‘special’ plants that are particularly beneficial to wildlife. We have had initial success at reproducing a new *Miconia* (Melastomataceae) shrub, a genus in which all produce edible fruits that birds can’t resist. They are also hostplants for numerous butterfly species. Many species of birds, including Collared Aracari and Gartered Trogon now enter the gardens to feed on *Miconia* fruits. There are other species of *Miconia* nearby that we will try and reproduce. We have also had initial success at rooting a new unidentified vine (Asteraceae). This plant arrived on its own and bloomed near the house for the first time last December. The blooms attracted many rare metalmarks and hairstreaks and we recorded many property records on the one plant (See pages 13 & 14 of the December 2023 newsletter for details). We were able to root several plants and now have them growing on a



*Above-male Gartered Trogon feeding on Miconia
below the cabin.*

trellis by one of the Porterweed gardens. This was designed in a way that future clusters of blooms can hang down where one can photograph butterflies. If this initial experiment works (fingers crossed), we will replicate it elsewhere on the property. We have also been able to get another native plant established (*Baccharis sp.*-Asteraceae) which produces blooms for many months on end and also attracts metalmarks and hairstreaks. Our *arsenal* of flowering plants continues to grow and with it the possibility of attracting more rare species and property records.

*Collared
Aracari-feeding
on Miconia by
the hosue.*





Left-Three young plants we were able to root. Our newest plant in our arsenal of butterfly-attracting flowers.

Below-The three young plants are now growing in an experimental garden.





Gold-bordered Hairstreak (Rekoa palegon)-This is the very first butterfly we observed on the first, and only, Baccharis shrub we have growing.

Research News

Growing up as a child with a fascination of the natural world, I never fathomed that I would someday be carrying out ‘scientific’ work. I do not consider myself a *scientist*, but rather a Naturalist, always having the desire to find and document flora and fauna, especially things I have never seen. And then I like to share these findings with anyone interested. Going beyond just an appreciation of Nature has led me to write and publish books, including two major volumes on Honduras’ avifauna. With birds, I was never really involved with anything technical, like mist netting or carrying out any kind of surveys requiring a strict methodology.

Working on the butterflies of Honduras, however, has been a whole different story. I have worked with scientists from different countries on technical aspects of butterfly identification, describing and publishing new species, describing new life cycles (coming soon!), and carrying out more formal studies. This work has been nothing less than fascinating and satisfying.



Robert and Eric ca 1979

Butterfly News at Emerald Valley

In the last newsletter we reported 738 species for the property. The list now stands at an amazing 755. Will we ever reach 800? Quite possible.

During each mistflower blooming season, and accompanying festival, we obtain more property and/or country records. This past January was no exception. For the first time, we hired someone to help us with the monitoring of the mistflowers in two gardens. Recall that we have a couple hundred, full-sized blooming plants that attract thousands of individual butterflies each day. Attempting to document all the species that come and go is a monumental task. Let alone being competent enough to discern the differences between most of them and having an ‘eye’ to know when there’s something unusual present.

There really is only one other person in Honduras competent enough and who has the passion for butterfly watching. And this person had enough spare time to help out. This is Harlin Maldonado. He helped document so many butterflies around his home in Puerto Cortes and found many country records and very rare species. Many of his photos appear in our book. So,

we hired him for 17 days and he stayed in the guest bedroom. Even during the festival, while everyone else went to other sites to see butterflies, he stayed glued to our gardens.



*Harlin Maldonado-
photo-documenting all
the butterflies in
Emerald Valley's
mistflower gardens.*



Polla Blue-Skipper (Paches polla)



*Artemides Skipper (Spioniades artemides)-virtually
unknown from most of Central America. A MEGA find!!*

As part of a 5-7 year study, we are compiling a list of all species that utilize the mistflower. Additionally, we undertake six days of listing every single species that nectar on the flowers. With his help, we were able to add 59 species that had never been observed feeding on mistflowers. The total number of species observed on mistflowers now stands at 424, representing 56% of all species that occur at Emerald Valley. Harlin was also able to document three species that represented country records, one of which (*Artemides Skipper-Spioniades artemides*), was what we call a MEGA find.

Expedition to La Mosquitia

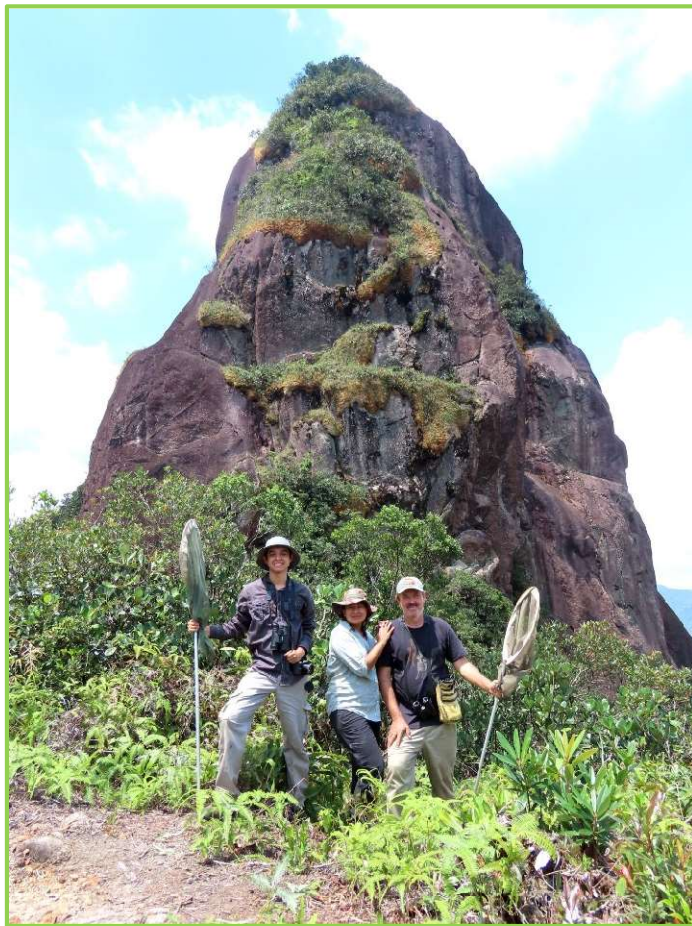
Each year we attempt to undertake a lengthy butterfly trip to more remote sites in Honduras as part of our ongoing research. This year we returned to a different area in the La Mosquitia region of eastern Honduras. We have undertaken one trip to the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve in March 2019 where we recorded 33 new country records. In April 2023 we travelled to the Tawahka-Asangni Reserve and recorded 10 country records. During both of these trips, some of these finds represented significant range extensions, not being reported in Nicaragua or even Costa Rica. It remains without a doubt that eastern Honduras harbors an untold amount of species not yet recorded for the country.

This past April we undertook another trip to the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve to a location Robert had visited several times before. These prior trips, however, were with paying clients when no butterfly work was carried out. Again, our friend Alejandro organized the logistics of this trip. We met in La Ceiba where we bought supplies and at 2:30 a.m. the next day we made the long drive along the north coast to the village of Batalla. Much of the landscape along the drive was laid waste for cattle pastures and African Palm Oil. We reached the village, starry eyed, and loaded the supplies into our boat. We spent the remainder of the day making our way up Rio Platano until we reached the town of Las Marias. It was a long day, but we still had to make last minute arrangements for the trip to our final destination, Pico Dama.



*Our full group
at the Pico
Dama base
camp.*

The following morning, we hooked up with our local guide, Martin, and made our way upriver in a motor boat until reaching the starting point of our hike. The last time I was there in 2016, there was contiguous forest cover from the river all the way to the cabin up in the forest. Since then, the government had granted land titles to the local indigenous peoples and many of them (illegally) sold their plots to settlers from elsewhere in the country. They, in turn, used chainsaws to lay waste to the plots they purchased and continued upslope. The ugly face of development reaches virtually every corner of this planet. Here, they demolished the natural landscape to make room for cattle as no crops can be sustainably grown in this wet environment. It was one of the saddest things I had ever seen. We had to walk for nearly two hours before finally reaching forest cover. At a creek crossing, we came across a huge Fer-de-lance that someone had killed and hung up on a stake. It was a reminder that we were in *their* territory. Once inside the forest, it was a fairly short hike until reaching the cabin. We made it. After getting settled in, we wasted no time in setting up several canopy traps and other fruit baits.



Harlin, Olivia, and myself at the foot of Pico Dama. This rock monolith, which looks small, is actually 400 ft. tall. No one has ever scaled it.

We spent the next two days around the cabin area and did some surveying. A bit of rain hampered research efforts a bit, but we did manage to document species that were not previously in our collection. A Costa Rican Peacock-Skipper (*Artines rica*) was found by the cabin on the first morning and was not seen again. So far, we did not find any country records and overall butterfly numbers around camp were surprisingly low. A few interesting butterflies also showed up inside the canopy traps and on the fruit-filled sock baits. On the third day we woke to clear skies, and this was our day to hike to Pico Dama. We packed

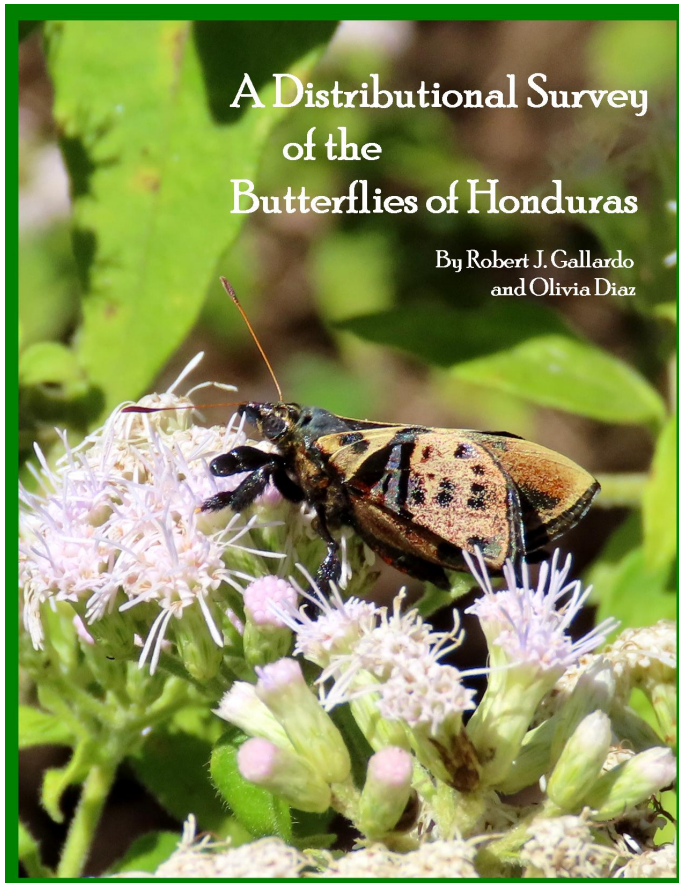
lunch and continued up the mountain. We saw some great birds, including the prized Yellow-eared Toucanet which is always seen in that area. Butterfly activity, however, was surprisingly slow. We got closer to the peak itself and began to get breathtaking views of the Rio Platano basin below us. At least from our vantage point there was rainforest as far as one could see.

Upon reaching the base of the peak we finally encountered a small flurry of butterfly activity. Some small species darted in and out of the thick vegetation and we were finally able to photo-document several species, all of which were country records. We started the descent to the cabin and were able to turn up a few more interesting butterflies.

Since the butterfly activity was slow, we decided to cut short the expedition. We descended the mountain and were picked up by the boat then returned to Las Marias. The following day we motored down to the coast where the truck was parked and made our way home. We were able to document three country records, obtain some specimens for species that were already confirmed but absent in our collection, and photo-document numerous species for which we did not have photos.

THE Last Book

Some of you may be wondering, why do we continue to carry out butterfly research when we have already published a book? Collectively, we have added nearly 400 country records to the original list published by Miller in 2012, but we know that we have barely scratched the surface



in terms of our basic understanding of species distribution in the country, what habitats each species is found in, and the elevational ranges for them. Being able to uncover all this information would take many lifetimes of study involving many people. However, we do know that there may be as many as 500 additional species that could occur in Honduras and that list continues to expand. Toward the end of the butterfly guide one can find such a list and we are already slowly beginning to check off species. We are also discovering species that have never been recorded in Nicaragua or Costa Rica, and occur from Panama southward. So, the list of possible species is being expanded.

Mock-up of the cover of one final book.

The overall goal is to continue to search for butterflies across the varied Honduran landscape for another 10-15 years. Our personal goal is to reach 500 country records. Olivia and I now stand at 338, so we have our work cut out for us. Although we will undertake some field work each year, for the interim it will be limited as we are in the process of building our eco-lodge at Emerald Valley. At some point in time we will start to put together one last publication which will be a Distributional Survey of the Butterflies of Honduras, replete with possibly two thousand images and maps for each species. It will be my last book.

Featured Flora & Fauna

Bird-Crimson-collared Tanager (*Ramphocelus sanguinolentus*). If there is one bird that really stands out here at Emerald Valley, it is this one. The male and female are identical, both having striking red and black plumage. The stark, white bill makes them stand out against the green foliage. They emit a soft whistle, likely a contact note. They do sing, which consists of a series of soft, melodious whistles. Only once have we ever seen a nest. It was located about 12 ft. high in the fishtail palm next to the house. They had also previously nested in the mango tree that is next to the deluxe cabin. They are often seen feeding on fruits of the various species of *Miconia* shrubs. Another food source they are fond of are the inflorescences of *Piper* and eat them as if they were ears of corn, feeding on the fleshy outer layer. We do know that any young that are reared are not allowed to stay in the home range of the parents. The one pair also will not allow any other Crimson-collareds to come here. Virtually year round, the pair is always seen together.



Lovely Crimson-collared Tanager inspecting a Miconia shrub for ripened fruits.

A couple of years ago one disappeared, leaving a single bird here for nearly five months. It almost appeared to be melancholic until finally one day, another appeared. Although common across much of its range, inhabiting light forests and gardens, we are always happy to see this handsome bird in our front yard or feeding next to the cabin. It is a favorite sighting for visitors, especially those who have never seen one before.



The Crimson-collared Tanager is such a photogenic bird. The pair is seen around the house and cabins all day, every day.

Above right-feeding on a Piper inflorescence.

Left-nesting in the fishtail palm.

Butterfly-Glamis Skipper (*Cyclosma glamis*)-Standing out amidst the bewildering world of skippers is this enigmatic species. Recall that here at Emerald Valley alone we have 318 species of them! On December 31, 2017 I found an interesting skipper feeding in our ‘wild’ mistflower garden. I was able to get a couple of photos before collecting it. Its silvery-gray sheen and maroon-colored saddle on the upper thorax readily set it apart from all other species I was familiar with. It did not appear in the Mexico field guide, and for a good reason. I sent photos of the living individual and of the specimen to Bernard who said it had the appearance of a species that occurs in Peru. What the heck? It had the making of another new species, so I sent a leg to Nick for DNA sequencing. Well, he was able to dig up a pair of specimens in the British Natural History Museum that were collected in Panama in the 1960’s, and apparently has not been seen there since. Lab results showed that our skipper is apparently the same species that occurs in Peru. Go figure, another disjunct species at Emerald Valley.

The next one to appear was in September 2019 while baiting for skippers at Skipper Pass. Since then, we see them during every mistflower blooming season when 2-3 different individuals often appear. Whatever the reasons for it being here and Peru, and nowhere else in between, will likely remain a mystery for a long time. But, we are always happy to see this sprite species in the gardens and show it to participants during the butterfly festival.



Above-only once have we recorded the Glamis Skipper on a paper lure.

Right-the very first individual recorded at Emerald Valley. On Blue Mistflower.



Plant-Bitter Vine (*Mikania micrantha*)-At Emerald Valley we have a wonderful assortment of plants in our botanic ‘arsenal’ that produce flowers that attract butterflies (other than mistflower). A few are bought in nurseries, but most are plants native to the property or elsewhere in the country. The Bitter Vine is one (of two) plants that arrived on its own. Its arrival was likely spurred when we did a heavy maintenance job along the power lines. This was necessary as we have two primary lines that bring in a lot of current into the property. Whenever something touched both wires at the same time, one of the two fuses would burn out and I would have to go get our electrician to climb a utility pole and install a new fuse. This happened more times than I’d like to remember. So, we had to push back the tree line at least fifty feet from the lines and this opened up a corridor of open area along the lower access road. Sun loving plants, such as this vine, were able to prosper, along with a host of other wildflowers. Many ‘weedy’ plants, and the butterflies that use them as hostplants, and nectar sources, will benefit from this.

It was January 2021 that I first noticed this ‘new’ flowering plant. There were a couple plants near the house along the road and were attracting a fairly large number of butterflies ranging from brushfoots, metalmarks, and hairstreaks. In a two year period we were able to record some amazingly spectacular butterflies, including many property records. Sometimes, their blooming cycle coincides with that of the mistflower and Black Sage (to be featured in the future), making Emerald Valley an absolutely magical place to look for and photograph butterflies.

We continue to search for and bring in different flowering plants in order to increase the ‘menu’ for the butterflies and also the opportunity for butterfly aficionados to witness and photograph a wider range of species.



Left-a stunning male Turquoise Emperor (Doxocopa laurentia)

Above-the mega rare Green-spotted Brangas (Brangas carthaea)



Mexican Arcas (Arcas cypria)-this small hairstreak is an amazing sighting.



Regal Hairstreak (Evenus regalis)-a large and spectacular hairstreak

Schaus' Ipidecla (Ipidecla schausi)-The only at Emerald Valley is of this male.



Testimonials

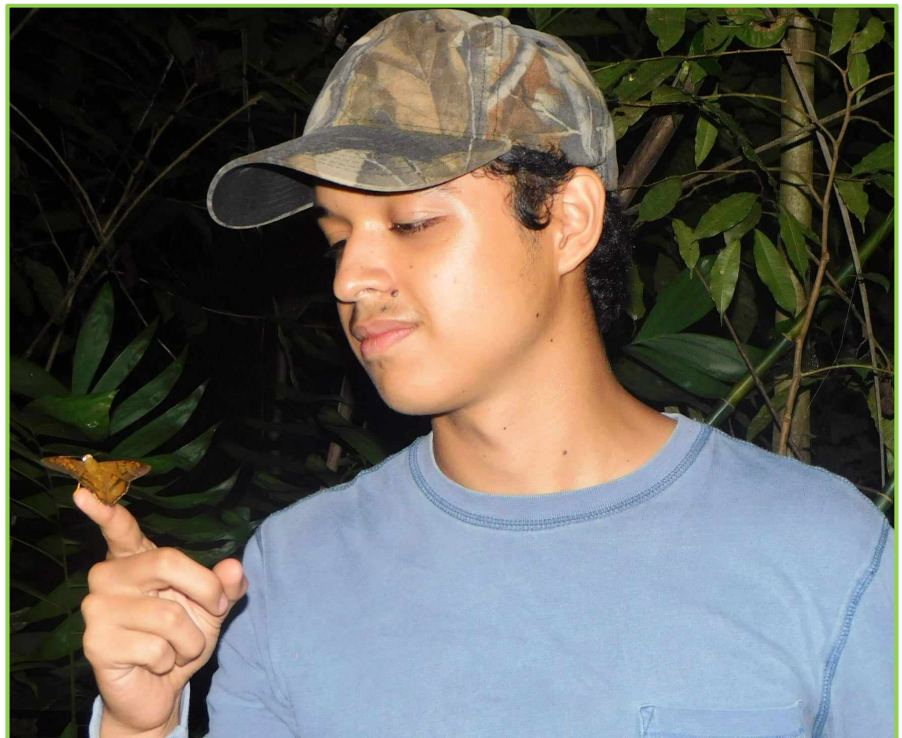
In each issue we will include testimonials from those who have visited Emerald Valley, participants of the butterfly festival, and those who support our programs. Each person comes and leaves with different experiences and we'd like to share them with everyone. It's always our pleasure to share these experiences with everyone.

“**Mi**s experiencias en Valle Esmeralda han sido únicas, la Naturaleza, la tranquilidad y el servicio que ofrece este lugar es excelente. Sin embargo, lo mejor de todo es la increíble cantidad de mariposas que existen allí. Como amante de las mariposas, puedo decir que Valle Esmeralda es el mejor lugar para observar y fotografiar mariposas en Honduras. Por lo tanto, todo amante de estas joyas voladoras debería de conocer este lugar por lo menos una vez en su vida.

My experiences at Emerald Valley have been singular, Mother Nature, the serenity, and the service offered at this place is excellent.

My experiences at Emerald Valley have been singular. Nature, the tranquility, and services that this place offers are excellent. However, the best part of it all is the incredible quantity of butterflies that exist there. As a butterfly aficionado, I can say that Emerald Valley is the best place to observe and photograph butterflies in Honduras. Therefore, any enthusiast of these flying gems should visit this place at least once in their life”.

***Harlin Maldonado-
Honduras***



“My wife and I first met Robert during a birding trip in Southwestern Arizona in 2023. We quickly became aware of not only his abilities as a birding guide, but also his knowledge of butterflies and the natural world. His passion for conservation, ecology and his love of his home in Honduras was infectious. It was during a presentation of Emerald Valley and the International Butterfly Festival that we decided we must visit this little slice of paradise for ourselves.

Our opportunity came in February of 2024 when we were able to take a few extra days prior to a scheduled birding trip of Honduras. Robert and Olivia proved to be gracious hosts and knowledgeable ambassadors of Honduras. We were fortunate to stay in their recently completed eco-lodge cabin and experience the tropical ambiance that Robert had described so eloquently. The cabin is spacious with all the amenities of home. It is perched on a hillside with grand views of the valley below. The food was plentiful, delicious and prepared with care by Olivia. The menu reflected her Honduran roots and the local ingredients selected with care.



There has been some very conservative development on the property, but great care has been taken to preserve the forest and landscape. Trails weave between towering rainforest trees, wind among flowering shrubs and plants and break onto picturesque vistas. Future plans for more trails through this valley will allow the observer access to even more of this magical place.

Arlana and Arden-during their visit to Honduras we went to the El Cajon area to see the endemic Honduran Emerald, and found it. Photo at the El Rancho restaurant where we had lunch.

Honduras does not get enough credit for its biodiversity. The sheer number of butterflies on this property alone is mind-boggling. Robert admitted to me that he estimates to have only surveyed about twenty-five percent of his property to this point. As birders we were pleased to be continuously serenaded by birds that have found a safe respite in this valley. Robert and Olivia have found that nature will provide everything that every species needs if you just give it a chance. What is good for the butterflies, the birds, and the mammals is ultimately good for people. Their quest to acquire more of the surrounding

properties to expand and restore the valley is admirable, and necessary, to preserve the biodiversity of the area.

Robert and Olivia's plans for the future of Emerald Valley, may at first glance, seem ambitious. However, when one considers how much has already been accomplished in a relatively short period of time, I am confident they will succeed. It is immediately evident when you meet Robert and Olivia that they are people with dreams, and a five year plan to make them come true. I am in full support of this ground-roots movement for conservation and ecotourism. For all Honduras has to offer, my wife summed it up best when she said "When I go back to Honduras, it will be to see Robert, Olivia, and Emerald Valley."



Arlana and Arden Powell-Canada

“My family and I spent a few days at Emerald Valley in late December. We were looking for something different from our normal Christmas holiday vacation, and this turned out to be the perfect choice. My wife and I are retired and our two sons are both young professionals living in major metropolitan areas of the USA. Emerald Valley was the perfect locale for us to spend some memorable times together as a family.

My wife and I stayed in the guest cabin. The cabin was spacious, comfortable, and spotlessly clean, perched on a hill a short distance from the main house. From the cabin’s outdoor terrace, the view of the surrounding nature was nothing less than spectacular in a very lush, jungle type of way. In the evening we would sit on the terrace sipping some wine and listening to all of nature’s glorious sounds... birds, crickets, frogs, everything!

At the foot of the hill, is the main house. Our sons stayed in a guest room there, and that is also where Robert and Olivia live. Olivia prepared our meals (breakfast and dinner), all of which were home cooked and delicious with fresh local ingredients. My wife and I both thought the food was better quality than any local restaurant, and my sons... well they just couldn’t get enough! Both hearty and tasty!

We started our stay with an early morning bird watching session from the cabin terrace. Robert guided us and would point out the different birds. He recognized all their sounds and would immediately say which type of bird it was while we were all trying to locate and focus our binoculars on them. We got some great photos which provide excellent proof to our friends about how experienced we are as bird watchers...

Next we went on a short hike with Robert and he pointed out the various species of butterflies. I don’t know exactly how many different ones we saw, but Emerald Valley has around 750 different species so there were plenty to see. The whole area is so lush and filled with vegetation and flowers that attract them. It was truly amazing. We even saw a pair mating (I guess love was in the air).

No one in my family had ever been birding or butterfly watching before, and to have our first experience guided by Honduras’ preeminent naturalist is quite something! (He wrote both the books: *Birds of Honduras*, and *Butterflies of Honduras*)! I could see the excitement in my families’ eyes during the rest of the stay as they continually kept looking to spot different birds and butterflies. Hopefully life long pursuits for us all!

But enjoying the birds and butterflies of Emerald Valley was only a part of the nature we shared during those days. We used Emerald Valley as a base to explore the area around Lake Yojoa. Robert arranged for us to take a tour of the lake on a boat with a local guide, a truly amazing excursion. Having passed the lake by road in the past, I never dreamed how unspoiled

and lush the shores and surrounding area were.

We also took a nature hike in Los Naranjos Ecological Park which was beautifully lush with gorgeous trees and plants right on the edge of the lake. The park contains a pre-classic era Lenca archaeological site consisting of several pre-Columbian mounds and a small museum. The last spot we visited was Puhlapanzak Falls which are about 17 km away but well worth the detour.

The days we spent together as family in Emerald Valley exceeded my expectations. I look forward to returning in the future and digging a bit deeper into the nature of the area and continuing to expand our appreciation of the flora and fauna. Above all, Robert and Olivia were gracious and warm hosts making us feel at home in their tropical paradise”.

Jeffrey Teague and Family-U.S. & Honduras



“It was wonderful to see what Robert & Olivia have accomplished at Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center. I have followed Robert’s projects for years and couldn’t wait to see this one in person. My sister and I spent two weeks in February 2024 enjoying the tranquility, discovering butterflies, birds, orchids, and other treats in this beautiful natural setting. The new ‘deluxe’ guesthouse is very comfortable, with a deck overlooking the valley. I was very impressed with the design, materials, and quality of construction.

Work on additional cabins was well underway. An impressive amount of physical labor is required to build anything so far off the beaten path. When Robert wasn’t guiding us on nature outings, he was pitching in on the building site.

In addition to exploring the immediate grounds, we went on several outings. With two weeks in Emerald Valley, we had time to explore other area attractions, too. We started off with a boat excursion on Lake Yojoa to see birds (and an otter!). It was a fine day out with Robert, Olivia, and Ellie (Robert’s feisty mother and our first cousin). My sister and I returned to the water twice on our own to go kayaking and birding on the canal.

Robert guided us up through the forest and Skipper Pass and up to Enchanted Peak, a lovely and challenging trail. A bit of machete work was involved. Though not peak season for orchids, we did find a few, including stunning groups of large lavender blooms whose names I do not recall. I’m sure Robert does, as he is an expert in orchids as well as birds and butterflies.

After that excursion, our visit to Los Naranjos Ecological and Archeological Park made for a pleasant day out. The trails and boardwalks were well maintained and made for comfortable birding.

We also visited Explore BioParque Paradise, a private garden. The beautiful grounds have a river running through with lots of bridges for access. In warmer weather, I’d definitely have gone for a dip in its clear waters.

No visit to the region is complete without looking for Quetzals. Roberto arranged an outing with local guide Léonel in Santa Barbara Mountain National Park. The trail was quite steep in sections, but we persevered. Léonel knows this forest and where these incredible birds normally hang out, and Robert helped call them in. We were rewarded with a good view of a Resplendent Quetzal high in the canopy. These birds must be seen to be believed.

When not scampering through forest or floating in kayaks, we enjoyed Robert & Olivia’s warm hospitality in Emerald Valley. Olivia kept us well-fed the entire time with healthy, inventive dishes incorporating fresh local ingredients. As an extra challenge, she had to cook for my vegan sister. She met and exceeded our culinary expectations.

Breakfast was my favorite meal. It was served on the deck so we could enjoy the birdlife, butterflies, lizards and such that call Emerald Valley home. There’s nothing quite like breakfast with motmots (and tanagers, orioles, oropendolas, saltators, hummingbirds...). Breakfast always included fresh fruits, some of which I’d never seen before. Pancakes with Olivia’s special additions were delicious, especially when topped with Olivia’s own blueberry jam. Perfect!

We both will definitely return to Emerald Valley and wake once again to the haunting call of the resident Little Tinamou”.



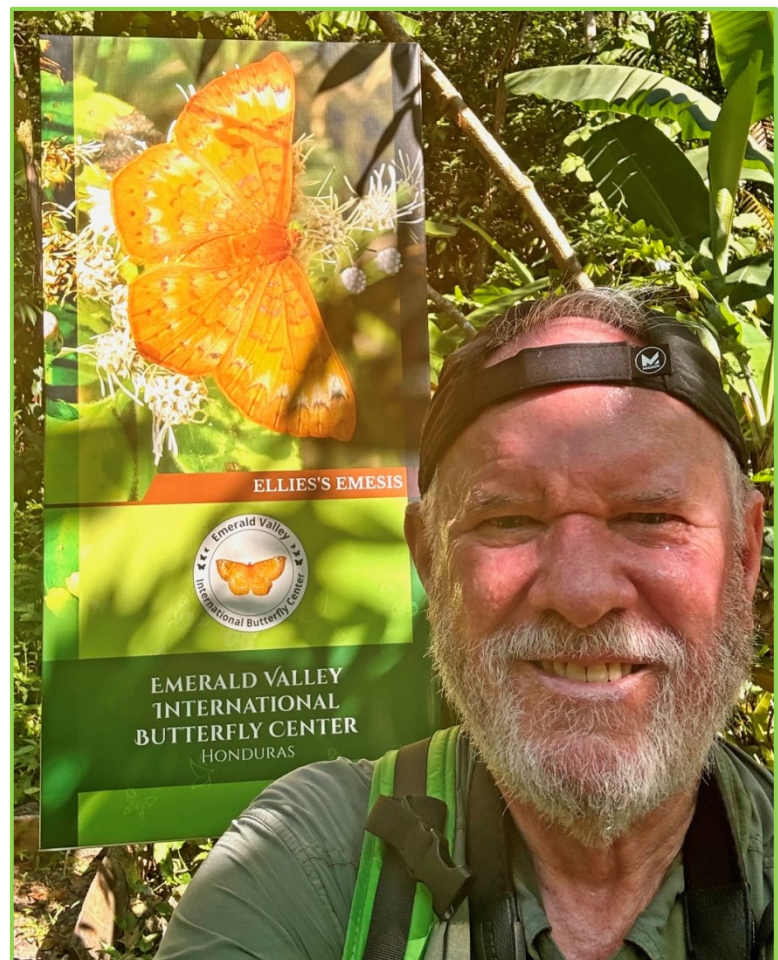
Glenda and Sharon Sisson-U.S.

“I first met Robert Gallardo at the 2022 Texas Butterfly Festival. I was impressed with his ability to spot butterflies and it was a delight to spend time with him in the field. In 2023 Robert told me about the annual Honduras Butterfly Festival that I had also heard about from several friends who had attended. It sounded intriguing so I signed up for the 2024 Honduras Butterfly Festival.

I have travelled extensively in Mexico and South America over the past 20 years for the primary purpose of photographing butterflies. Over that time, I have watched the butterfly and nature eco-tour business evolve so there are now many options for butterfly tours around the world. However, until I met Robert, I had no knowledge of any butterfly tours being offered in Central America and more specifically Honduras.

I arrived in Honduras in January 2024 and I was immediately impressed with the country, its people, culture, food and incredible diversity of wildlife. I attended the Honduras Butterfly Festival hosted by Robert Gallardo and Olivia Diaz and stayed on for the 3-day post-festival. Honduras sits at a crossroads of butterfly diversity with many species from Mexico, Central and South America occurring in a country roughly the size of the state of Ohio.

The Honduras Butterfly Festival affords the avid butterfly lover the opportunity to be immersed in a “sea of butterflies” in several locations in the Lake Yojoa region of Honduras. But the highlight of the festival is the time spent in the incredible Emerald Valley. Robert and Olivia have created a nature paradise in Emerald Valley filled with a vast array of butterflies, birds, mammals, and other fascinating flora and fauna.



The Honduras Butterfly Festival is scheduled each year to coincide with the peak blooming season of mistflower. Time spent in Emerald Valley's fabulous mistflower gardens never disappoints as there are literally clouds of butterflies there from morning to late afternoon every day. Also on the property is a large patch of Porterweed, numerous forest trails and strategically located fruit bait stations which offer opportunity to see up close many butterfly species not seen in the mistflower gardens.

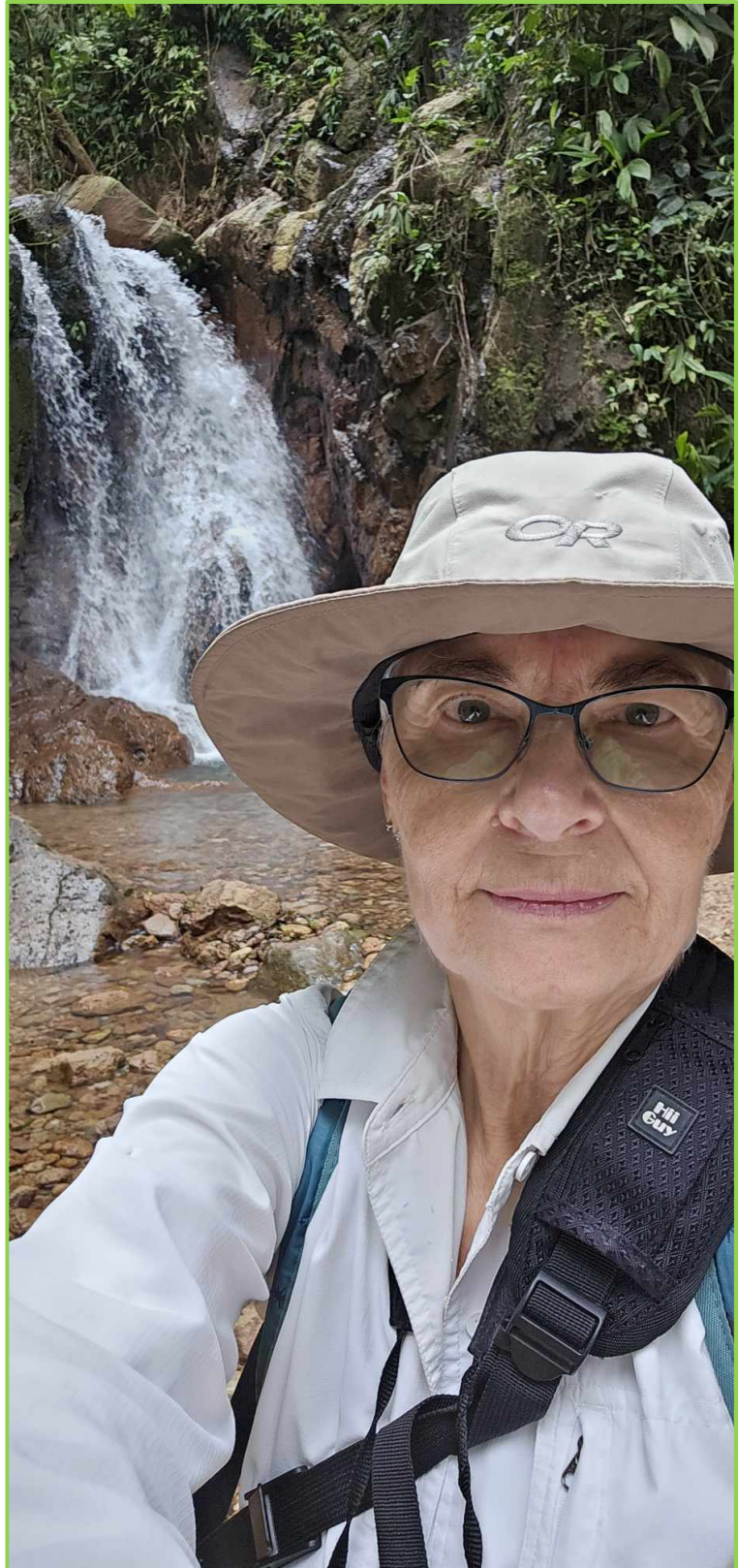
I saw almost 300 species of butterflies in the 8 days I was in Honduras. This compares to about the same number that I have seen on my two-week Mexico and South America trips! The best thing though is that, unlike the Mexico and South America trips where you are constantly driving or flying to other locations, at the Honduras Butterfly Festival you are based in the Lake Yojoa area and mostly in Emerald Valley. It was a refreshing change to be able to be in the field by early morning instead of spending hours in a cramped vehicle eating sack lunches.

Olivia and her staff provided daily meals consisting of a variety of delicious local Honduran cuisine and that was truly an unexpected bonus. I will cherish the time I spent at the 2024 Honduras Butterfly Festival and I can't wait to go back in 2025!"

Jim Snyder-U.S.

“My visit to the 2024 Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival was my first time experiencing the diversity of tropical butterflies. I was prepared to be overwhelmed, and I was, but the combined expertise and guidance of both Robert Gallardo, our host, and Robert Gilson of Fauna Ventures, made it very manageable. Whether you are a neophyte or an experienced butterflyer, I unreservedly recommend this experience. Every day was an adventure with the possibility of seeing country records and rarities in a world class conservation setting. It was very satisfying to be able to contribute to emerging science by helping document the butterflies of Honduras. Being able to socialize with local nature enthusiasts, eat delicious cuisine, and stay in safe and comfortable accommodations made this a very memorable trip which continues now that I’m home and receive ongoing support as I edit my amazing photos. If you love butterflies, you must visit Emerald Valley”.

Susan Blayney-Canada



“Robert Gallardo and I go back to December 2002 when we met in La Ceiba and then traveled together to Copan where he had an orchid growing operation. We did some birding and then lost touch until 2018 when travel and birding friends Tim, Patty, Chuck and I met Robert in Nicaragua where he guided us on a two week birding and sightseeing trip. His birds of Honduras book had just been published and served us well in Nicaragua. We learned at that time of his ambitious plans for Emerald Valley and his work on a butterfly book for Honduras. We, of course, were interested in visiting Emerald Valley when the time was right to experience the butterflies and meet his partner Olivia.

We remained in contact and fast forward to January 2024 Tim, Patty and I came for a visit during the butterfly festival planned for the peak activity time. I arrived in San Pedro Sula the day before we were to catch a bus to Emerald Valley. I stayed in a nice B&B and although there are probably places in that city to be avoided I was in a safe area and walked to nearby stores, a bank and restaurant. A comfortable 60 mile bus ride brought us to a lodge overlooking Lake Yojoa where we had a good dinner with a nice view of the lake. There were several species of ducks and herons at the lake and we got a close up look at a snail kite. That evening the three of us we moved into the very nice cabin a short distance up the hill from the Emerald Valley lodge with a porch with hammocks that over looked the valley.

We had planned all along on helping with the festival and we did mostly by shuttling attendees from the main highway into the lodge area where the mistflower and porterweed gardens were. A treat was getting up in the morning and watching butterflies rain down into the garden area from the trees on the steep opposite hillside where they had roosted for the night. Morning was also the best time for birds as well with colorful Crimson-collared Tanagers, orioles, woodpeckers, and hermit hummingbirds were attracted to the plantings. One night a pygmy-owl landed on the handrail leading up the steps to the cabin and gave us a really good look from just a few feet away. As the day warmed, more and more butterflies made their appearance and the gardens really came alive. Cracker butterflies were an especially interesting new thing for me. One day, an unusual large mantis was found. My only disappointment is there were no snakes to be seen but that may be a plus for some people. Another for sure plus was there were almost no biting insects!

All the meals we had a EV were very good and a delicious bar-b-que was served at the end of festival. We are mostly birders but the enthusiasm of the butterfly lovers was catching and at least at the same level of rabid birders I've been around. Thousands of photos were taken from all angles, including those from a precarious perch on a stepladder. Robert and Olivia's new butterfly book was a great help with species identification. Additionally, Robert has comprehensive knowledge of all the flora and fauna in the area.

The butterfly festival at Emerald Valley is an enjoyable and highly recommended experience for anyone interested in the natural world.

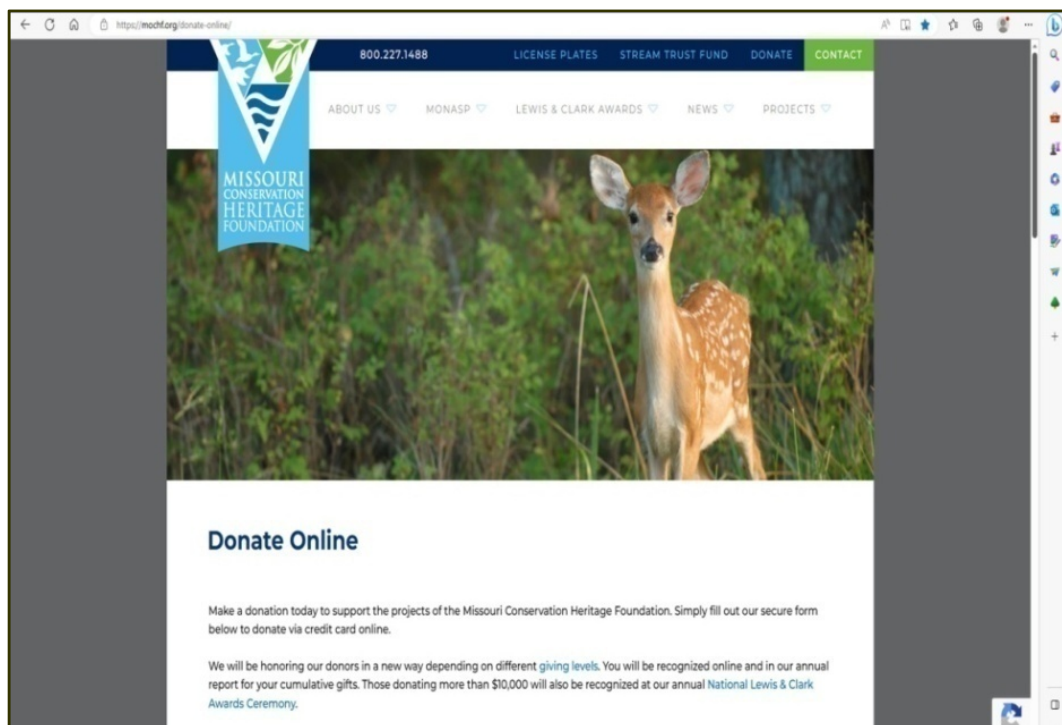


Ted Chu-U.S.

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. Currently, all donations are being utilized to purchase available properties for conservation purposes.

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.

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A check can also be sent to them at:

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



Institutions and businesses that support our efforts.



Robert & Olivia
Emerald Valley Managers

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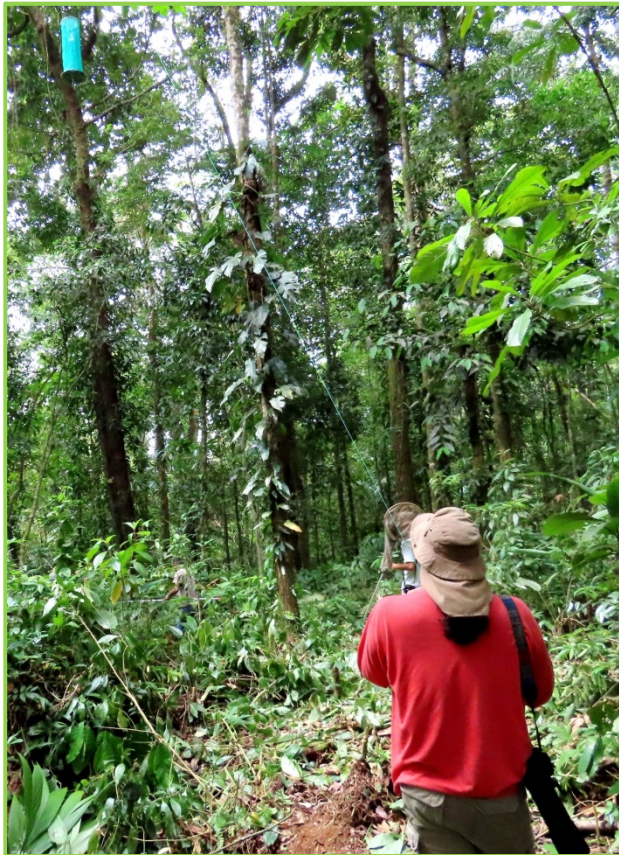
THANK YOU!

Photo gallery of Pico Dama Expedition



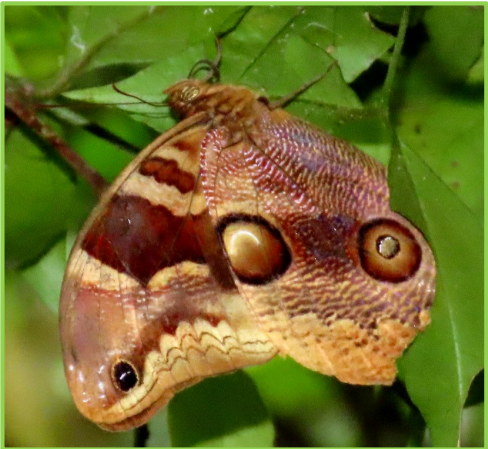
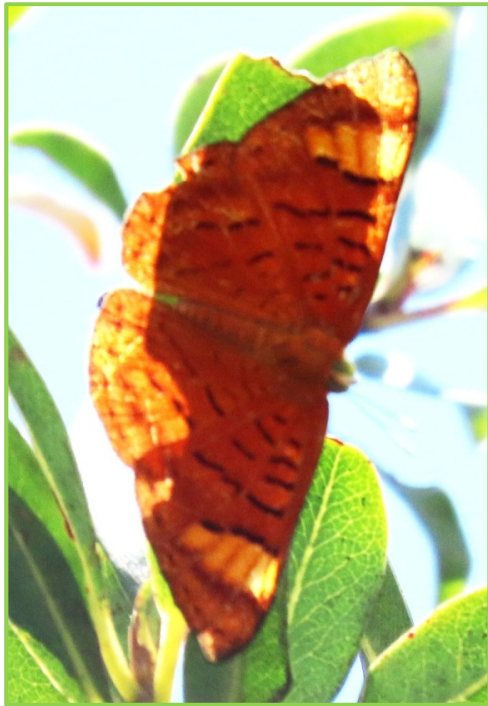
Our group at the foot of Pico Dama—drone photo courtesy of Yasser Alejandro

Raising canopy trap on arrival day.



Checking a trap. Something in it.





Top right-Costa Rican Peacock-Skipper (Artines rica)-Second site record for Honduras. Photo by Harlin Maldonado. Above-Celia Satyr (Pseudodebis celia). First photo of living individual. Top left-Striated Emesis (Emesis lacrines)-country record. Left center-Orange-rimmed Owl-Butterfly (Catoblepia orgetorix). First photo of living individual-Left bottom-Great Satyr (Taygetis mermeria). First photo of living individual.



Above-Latrea Skipper (Potamanaxas latrea)-country record.

Top Left-Tiger-striped Metalmark (Tigria xypete)-country record.

Center Left-Simple Sarota (Sarota acantus)-first photo of living individual.

Bottom Left-Aroma Skipper (Aroma aroma)-first photo of living individual.



Photo Gallery of 2024 Butterfly Festival



Above-Allan does such a great job with the local kids.

Left-Robert Gilson enjoying a surprise birthday cake.



Right-Ready, aim, fire! Robert Gilson, Alison Smith, and Susan Blayney in the mistflower garden at Emerald Valley.





Top Left-White-banded Metalmark (Hypophylla sudias). Top right-Banded Tigerwing (Aeria eurimedia). Center Left-Glorious Blue-Skipper (Paches loxus). Center Right-Belt's Myscelus (Agara belti). Lower Left-Clearwinged Mimic-White (Dismorphia theucharila). Lower Right-Subrufescens Skipper (Vertica subrufescens). Country record.



Top Left-Ellie's Emesis (*Emesis eleanorae*)-Emerald Valley endemic. Top Right-Black-edged Euselasia (*Pelolasia cataleuca*). Right Center-Female Greater Metalmark (*Synargis nymphidioides*). Lower Left-Female Silvered Ruby-eye (*Lycas argentea*). Lower Right-Emerald Aguna (*Aguna claxon*).