



Friends of **Emerald Valley**

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

December 2025



Letter from the Editor

Hi everyone, and Greetings from Emerald Valley.

With this sixth issue of the newsletter we are concluding another exciting year.

As we round the corner into 2026 we are preparing for our VII annual Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival. For many of the participants, it will be their first time here and we welcome them. This time around, however, we will be holding a Community Day, just prior to the main event. Entry will be free to anyone who wishes to come and enjoy the butterflies and the reserve. Teachers and groups of children are already planning on being here.

Several Naturalist Journeys groups are already booked for the first half of the new year. Private groups are also coming. The dream we have worked so hard for and so long, is now becoming a reality.

The employee's cabin is now finished and we got a good head start on the second duplex cabin.

Next year is building up to be quite exciting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BJ Jaeger", is positioned above a horizontal line.

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 how 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 768 species. Our eco-lodge is slowly growing so guests can come and stay.



Drone view of Emerald Valley with Santa Barbara National Park in the distance.

What's New at Emerald Valley

Expanding Limits

Since June, we have made no further property purchases. The size of Emerald Valley is just over 86 acres and we are sure that more properties will become available in the future. This has been possible thanks to the support of many of you who have sent in donations to the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation. A HUGE round of applause to everyone!! Purchasing these lands ensures that more forest is protected for mammals, and both breeding and migratory birds alike. We will continue to inquire about potential properties.



*Google image showing the properties that stretch from close to the lake's edge westward toward the paved road.
With your help we are creating a real biological corridor.*

Continued Building

Since the last issue, we have made a little more progress on building. Robert has had a very busy guiding schedule during the year, so construction has slowed down. The decks and roofs for the second duplex cabin were finished as well as completing the dorm unit.



Drone photo showing the overall layout at Emerald Valley. Advances on the second duplex can be seen on the lower right. The yellow box shows where the future restaurant will be located.

If all goes as planned, we hope to finish the new duplex by the end of 2026. We also plan on installing a small washroom and continue to put in more cement tracks along the road. Little by little, we are plugging away at all the necessary infrastructure needed here.

Another Toucan Released

In August, a friend (Evelyn) contacted us saying that a baby toucan appeared in her back yard on the outskirts of San Pedro Sula. It was a young Collared Aracari. It landed there and there was no way out due to the high walls. She didn't know what to do and many of her friends wanted it as a caged pet. She said 'no way' to them. I told her that we could take the toucan, finish rearing it, and release it back into the wild. So, we made plans for her to come to Emerald Valley and she did, along with a sister. They came and spent a good part of the day with us. They loved our place. The little Aracari seemed bewildered as to its new environs. We put it in the large pen where we had finished rearing Tuki. Unlike Tuki, however, this little toucan wanted nothing to do with people. We finished rearing it and in no time it was ready to fly. In late September, we released it back into the wild and hoped it would be incorporated into the group of aracaris that are already in the area.



Meet Mattis

Mattis Pagany Hernandez is one of five children of Exequiel and Melvin. This young man has been learning the birds of Honduras for the past several years while going out with his parents and friends, along with being an active member of *Aves de Honduras* (a local non-profit organization dedicated to bird conservation and promotion). He has been learning English and has acquired much equipment, including a spotting scope. Perhaps, since knowing Robert and Olivia, he has decided that he wants to be a nature guide. Starting in 2026, he will be Robert's apprentice, accompanying him during most of the tours that will be arriving at Emerald Valley. In January, he will also start to learn the butterflies alongside Harlin Maldonado and take an active role in the upcoming butterfly festival. We all look forward to seeing Mattis' progress as he begins a bright and rewarding career that lay ahead of him.



Meet Harlin

Harlin Maldonado is the son of Glenda and Arnaldo. Harlin attended our second butterfly festival where he won a digital camera. Ever since, he has really been hooked on butterflies and has been an integral part of each event. Two years ago, Robert decided to initiate a formal study on the diversity of butterfly species that utilize the mistflowers. He hires Harlin to monitor the plants in two main gardens and his keen eyes have added both country and property records. He has turned up species that Robert has never even seen! Harlin is now studying Biology at the national university and we will closely follow his promising future.



Harlin with a Common Scarlet-eye at Skipper Pass.

Reaching Out

In November Robert and Olivia travelled to the U.S. to enjoy a little R&R, have a family reunion in California, see some old friends, and the attend the Texas Butterfly Festival. Not only would they attend the festival, but would also have a stand there and he was also the keynote speaker. They went on field trips with Linda and Chris in the Xami group and saw some great butterflies, including a Great Purple Hairstreak. While there, they stayed at Oleander Acres and were attended by their gracious hosts, Seth and Candy. As with last year, they donated a package to the Emerald Valley butterfly festival to their silent auction and Brad Carlson won it. He will soon be travelling to Honduras. Robert and Olivia plan to attend the Texas festival each year and represent Honduras' incredible butterfly diversity.



Robert and Olivia with Stephanie (National Butterfly Center manager)



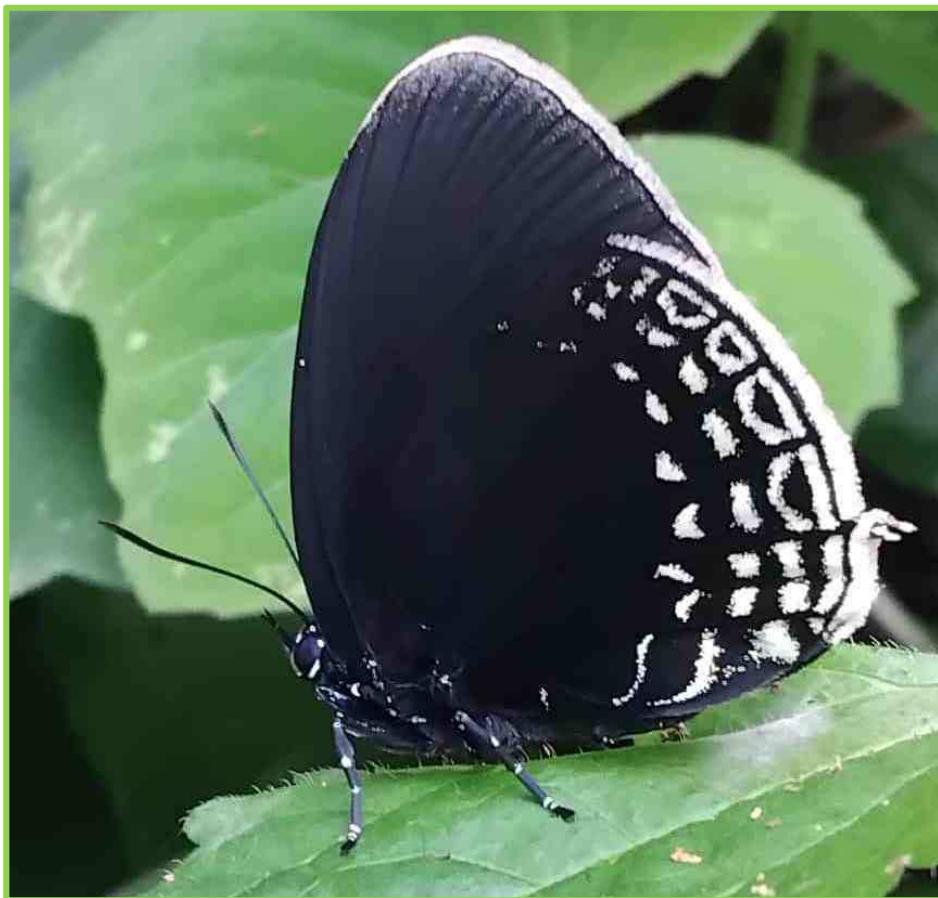
Olivia at our stand at the National Butterfly Center.



Robert as the keynote speaker this year.
Showing them Honduras' incredible
butterfly diversity and some of the work they
have carried out.

Research News

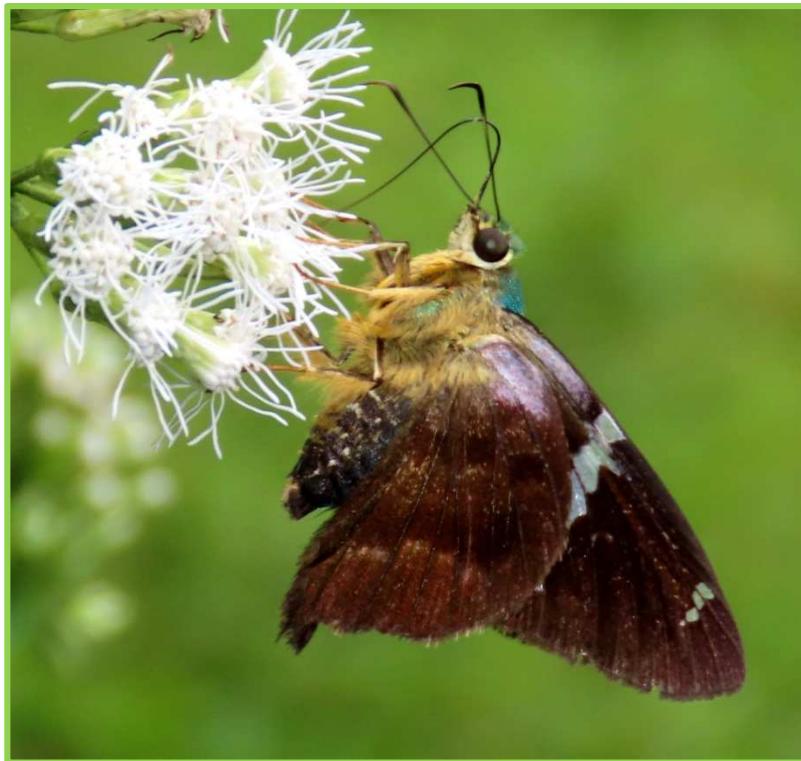
Due to Robert's guiding schedule and ongoing construction at Emerald Valley, he and Olivia were unable to do field work outside of Lake Yojoa during 2025. So, very few country records were obtained except for a few by Harlin and other observers elsewhere. Although Robert will not be guiding outside of Honduras much next year, they will be receiving many groups at Emerald Valley, plus having the goal to finish the new duplex cabin. So, it is unlikely they will be able to do much, if any, research again. But, one never knows. In May, Elmer Cruz found the Tailed Cycadian (*Theorema eumenia*) at Cerro Azul Copan N.P. In September, Jonathan Hernandez found the Hesperina Eyed-Metalmark (*Mesosemia hesperina*) at the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. Both of these are nice additions to the country list which now stands at 1,316 species.



Tailed Cycadian found by Elmer Cruz. It occurs to the north and south of Honduras, and was expected to occur here.



Hesperina Eyed-Metalmark discovered by Jonathan Hernandez. Its formerly ranged north to Nicaragua and was on our watch list.

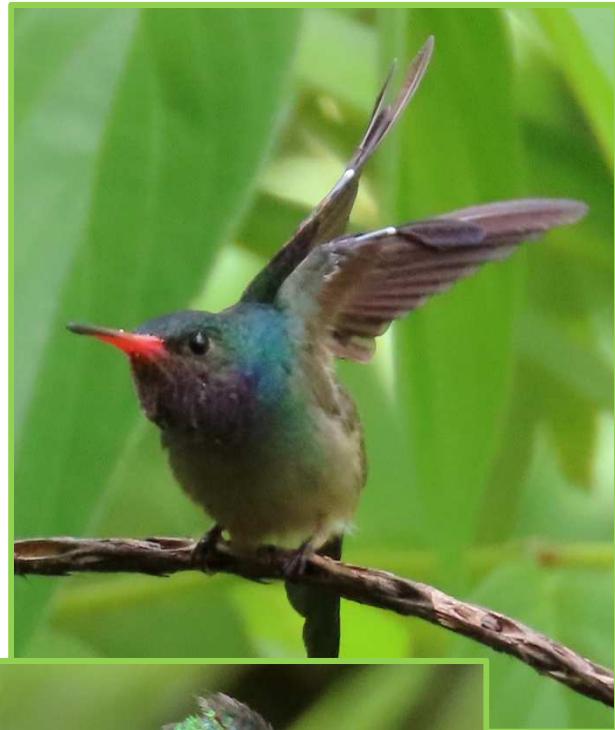


Tucuti Flasher. The latest addition to the mistflower study.

Our ongoing mistflower study continues at Emerald Valley where we are documenting all the species that are attracted to these magical flowers. To date, an amazing 478 species have been observed utilizing these flowers, including the Tucuti Flasher (*Urbanus tucuti*) that Robert recorded in late December. Harlin will once again return to monitor these flowers for no less than two weeks and Mattis will be joining him this time around. We plan on continuing this study for at least two more years before submitting a manuscript for review to publish.

Featured Flora & Fauna

Bird-Blue-throated Goldentail (*Chlorestes eliciae*)-So far, we have not featured a single hummingbird in any of the newsletters. What better species to choose than this one. We have recorded seventeen species of hummingbirds at Emerald Valley, and only a small handful can be found there year round. Superficially, it resembles the common Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, but is smaller, has a bronze-colored rump, more red on the bill, and has a purplish throat. It has appeared in front of the house only a few times, but it always feeds on the Porterweed flowers. As with many of the visiting species, it hangs around for a day, or two, before eventually moving on.



Butterfly-Green-spotted Brangas (*Brangas carthaea*)-Amidst the bewildering array of colorful butterflies at Emerald Valley is this beauty. To date, 97 lycaenids have been recorded on the property and many of them are rare to uncommon. Many inhabit the forest canopy and are rarely observed except for the occasional female that descends to oviposit or when specific flowers are in bloom. Robert and Olivia have propagated specific wildflowers as well as monitor others that are particularly effective at bringing in metalmarks and hairstreaks. Bitter Vine (*Mikania micrantha*) is one such plant, and has helped us record many butterflies that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. We have seen this Brangas only twice on the property; once in 2019 in a field below the house and in 2022 on the Bitter Vine. We have no records anywhere else in the country.



Plant- Spotted Brassia (*Brassia maculata*)-The hillsides that loom above Emerald Valley harbor a nice variety of native orchids. They are especially numerous on the rocky crags along the ridgeline that leads to Enchanted Peak. No one has apparently ever pilfered the orchids from this sacred spot. The Brassia orchids, sometimes referred to as 'Spider Orchids', have extra long sepals and petals, many of which have spotting. The species that exists at Emerald Valley blooms from around May to August and produce a fairly long inflorescence filled with the large flowers. These are not fragrant.



Brassia maculata-taken from a wild plant that grows atop Enchanted Peak.

Testimonials

In each issue we 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.

“I was lucky enough to attend the 2025 Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival, and I cannot say enough good things about it. This was my second time in Honduras for butterflies, but my first time at the festival. It blew me away! It was truly like nothing I have ever witnessed before. The amount of butterflies is almost overwhelming, but in a good way. You know you are never going to see everything, no matter how much time in the day you have but you can't stop looking, scanning, and wandering through the gardens. It's an endless smorgasbord of butterflies. Robert and Olivia have built a truly remarkable place in the valley, and their love for the butterflies and, really just nature in general, pours out of them. You can see the pride in Robert as people scurry back and forth, looking at different species he and his amazing crew calls out.

Vernie posing with Lukas at the Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival.

This festival, though, is not just about the flying gems that descend on the gardens. It's about the people that Robert and Olivia have surrounded themselves with. The wonderful people of Honduras, the current and former students, and their amazing friends. They help either monitor the garden or make us fabulous lunches. They even shuttle us back and forth from the nearby village to the property. They have built a wonderful community there and



it's on full display at the festival.

Lastly, even the lodging is great. I am a birder by heart and butterflier by choice, and our lodge was amazing for bird watching. We were nestled right at the edge of Lake Yojoa. Snail Kites were a constant sighting at the water and Bare-throated Tiger-Herons greet you at the boat dock. We even had motmots right out the door of our rooms. The food is also spectacular there.

The Emerald Valley Butterfly Festival is a one-of-a-kind event that should be enjoyed by all nature lovers and not just butterfly enthusiasts.”

Vernie Aikins-U.S.

“A Truly Amazing Experience! My trip to the Honduras Butterfly Festival hosted by Robert Gallardo, his wife Olivia, and his wonderful team was nothing short of extraordinary-a truly magical, once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The moment you arrive, you realize the property itself is breathtaking, a real life “butterfly amusement park.” The hosts were delightful, accommodating, and served delicious food to top it off. For days, I spent hours photographing countless species of butterflies in the beautiful surroundings. Robert was an exceptional guide, incredibly patient, and made sure everyone had the opportunity to witness and photograph as many unique species as possible. The attention to detail from Robert, Olivia, and everyone on the property made the trip absolutely perfect. I cannot recommend this experience enough!”

Mary Aikins, U.S.



“A unique place in Honduras to enjoy, learn, study, live with, and be aware of the topics of the environment, conservation, flora, fauna, birds, and butterflies. Emerald Valley is a place of opportunities.

I felt a great desire to know this place and it was how I had imagined; a permanent school to exchange knowledge, to learn about natural history. We visited Emerald Valley for the first time in 2022 when we shared treasured moments with Robert and Olivia, good conversation, and delicious food. We also enjoyed some bird watching there and saw many species. I returned once again in 2023 with a group of friends from Tegucigalpa along with another group from the north coast to receive a naturalist training course. Today, we carry out different duties as guides in ecotourism.

I returned once again to the butterfly book launch ceremony and yet again to stay in one of the cabins in order to enjoy this marvelous space. We will return whenever we can, taking with us a great richness in our hearts.”

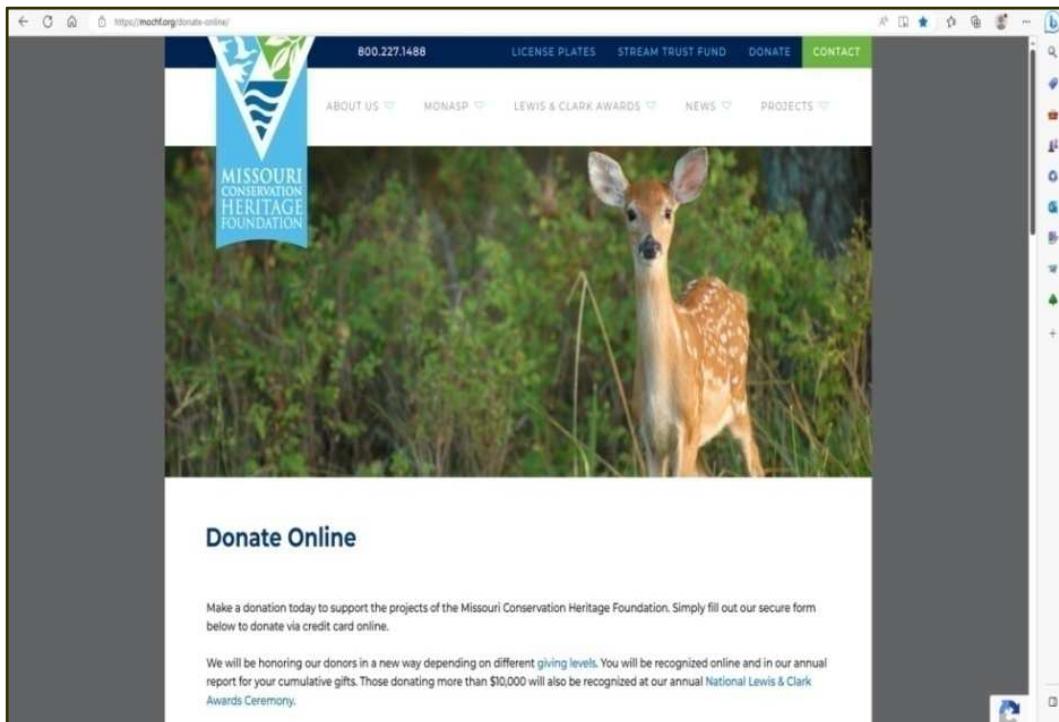


***Ing. Otilia Hernandez
Tourism Nature Guide
Honduras***

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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\$25 \$50

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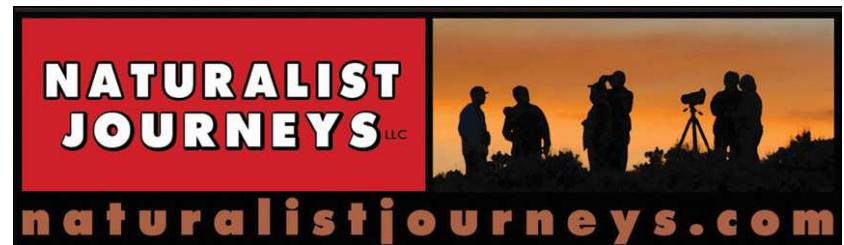


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A check can also be sent to them at:

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

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



Institutions and businesses that support our efforts.



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THANK YOU!