



Friends of

Emerald Valley

Lake Yojoa, Honduras

June 2025



Photo by Alejandro Calderón

Letter from the Editor

Hi everyone, and Greetings from Emerald Valley.

With this fifth issue of the newsletter we reach the half-way point toward our favorite time of year; the blooming of the Blue Mistflowers.

We attain yet another property purchase, increasing the holdings to a little over 86 acres. Emerald Valley continues to slowly grow in size which means that more birds and mammals are protected.

In the last issue we featured Tuki, a Keel-billed Toucan that was rescued by a friend and given to us to raise and eventually release into the wild. One day he up and left, returning to the forest.

We also welcome Naturalist Journeys, the first overseas operator to offer packages to stay at our cabins.

During the past several months we have been working on infrastructure by laying down more cement tracks, built an employee's cabin, erected a third rainwater collection tank, and initiated a second duplex cabin.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B.J. Sade", followed by a long horizontal flourish 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 Enchanted Peak which looms over Emerald Valley.

What's New at Emerald Valley

Expanding Limits

We are excited to announce that we are completing an eight purchase, increasing the size of Emerald Valley to just over 86 acres. 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 forests ensures that more forest is protected for mammals, and both breeding and migratory birds alike. We will continue to inquire about potential properties.



Google Earth view of the northwest corner of Lake Yojoa. The area outlined in white is the property currently being purchased.



Partial view of Lake Yojoa from inside the forest of the latest parcel being purchased.

A Lot of Building Going On

Since the last issue we have made a lot of progress on building infrastructure. This includes continuing work on the first duplex cabin, initiating a second duplex cabin, laying down more cement tracks along the entrance road, building an employee's dorm unit, and erecting another water storage tank.



Initiation of the second duplex cabin. The layout will be the same as the first duplex, but each room will have only one bed. One will be the Orchid Room and the other the Amphibian Room.



Laying down more cement tracks along the access road.

We hired a tractor to move part of the access road away from the rainwater ditch. We will plant mistflowers along the edges.





Masons stayed with us for five weeks, carrying out various projects. This rainwater collection tank will hold over 15,000 gallons and will be fed by the first duplex cabin.



Many of the people who worked during the heavy construction phase. Building this employee's cabin was relatively fast. It will be operating by the end of this year.

Emerald Valley Lodge Goes International

Starting in 2026 Naturalist Journeys LLC, will be the first overseas operator to offer all-inclusive packages at Emerald Valley. These trips will highlight the incredible bird diversity that Lake Yojoa has to offer where we will visit multiple sites during the tour. Also included will be a boat ride on the lake and a must-stop at a gourmet chocolate farm. For now, the company will be offering the three rooms that are available and hopefully by the end of 2026 the next duplex will be finished. For more information see: [Honduras Wildlife Tours & Birding Holiday Trips | Naturalist Journeys](#)

As we add more rooms we hope to attract more international operators.



The screenshot shows the landing page for Honduras on the Naturalist Journeys website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: HOME, ABOUT, DESTINATIONS, GUIDES, BOOK YOUR TRIP, TRIP REPORTS, CONTACT, BLOG, and CLIENT PORTAL. Below the navigation bar is a large image of a colorful macaw perched on a tree branch. The word "Honduras" is overlaid on the left side of the image. Below the image is a paragraph of text describing Honduras as a fascinating Central American country with abundant lakes, lush mountains, and pristine beaches. It mentions that more than 800 species of birds occur here, including the endemic Honduran Emerald and the stunning Resplendent Quetzal. The country also hosts mammals such as jaguars, monkeys, tapirs, and peccaries. Honduras is perhaps best known for the ruins of Copan, the "Paris of the Mayan world." Below this paragraph is a line of text stating that a Honduran birding tour is a natural next step in neotropical birding, sitting near the middle in terms of species count, and is a great trip for those who have done the introductory countries like Belize and Trinidad. Below this is another line of text stating that Naturalist Journeys is pleased to offer Honduras birding tours and Honduras nature tours, as well as other Central American birding tours, and encourages visitors to contact their travel planners with questions. Below this is a section titled "Guided Group Tours" with a paragraph of text stating that group travel is rewarding and fun, and that Travel Planners of Naturalist Journeys have been creating memorable journeys for 40+ years. They offer small-group birding and nature tours, limited to just 8-13 persons led by expert guides. Learn and explore with like-minded people, enjoy local food and culture, and immerse yourself in birding and nature. At the bottom of the page are three identical promotional banners for "Honduras' Emerald Valley A Short & Sweet Birding Blitz".

Landing page of the company's website where Emerald Valley is featured.

The Tale of Tuki

In the last issue we featured Tuki; a Keel-billed Toucan that was rescued by a friend and brought to us. We finished rearing it and when we thought it was ready to be released we let it out of an enclosure. It did not want to leave and slept in the forest close to the house. It would come and dine with us and was quite tame. Since some of its feathers were clipped when it was young, it could not fly well. It would forage most of the day on various wild fruits, but would always roost near the house. While I was on a tour in Panama he decided to up and leave. We may never know the fate of Tuki, but some people on the other side of the nearby ridge said they saw a 'tame' toucan in their yard. We hope it was him.

A New Toy & Promo Video

At the end of last year we ordered a small drone and Robert's mom brought it down in January. It wasn't until only recently that we have had the time to practice and put it up in the air. Capturing Emerald Valley at all times of day when the lighting was just right has been fun. When enough footage was obtained, we hired our friend Luis Cueva to put together a second promotional video. It can be seen at: [Emerald Valley 2025](#)



*The three
rooms at
Emerald
Valley*



*New
photos of
Emerald
Valley*

Something New at the Next Butterfly Festival

Next January we will hold our seventh consecutive butterfly festival and will be initiating something new. Two days before the main event commences we will be holding a Community Day, when Hondurans will be able to come and see the butterflies free of charge. Upon arrival, they will be given a short talk before being let into the gardens. Even though we have published a butterfly guide, there is very little interest in butterflies with Hondurans. We hope to generate more interest in insects by offering a day Emerald Valley.

Research News

Along with our ongoing mistflower study at Emerald Valley, we continue to inventory butterflies elsewhere.

In April 2022 Robert discovered a Salvin's Kite-Swallowtail female ovipositing on a native

soursop (Annonaceae) in a nearby national park. Two butterflies were successfully reared and hatched nearly two years later. With the aid of numerous experts, Robert was able to draft and describe the life cycle of this butterfly that has been known to science since 1864. It was recently published in the journal *Tropical Lepidoptera* and can be viewed at [June 2025, Volume 35, Number 1 | Tropical Lepidoptera Research](#)



First page of the published article



First Salvin's Kite-Butterfly to ever hatch in captivity.

Featured Flora & Fauna

Bird-Squirrel Cuckoo (*Piaya cayana*)-A favorite bird to see while visiting the Neotropics is this one. Due to its size and long tail, it is often quite visible and seemingly inquisitive. It has numerous common vocalizations, including a loud, high-pitched double-note whistle. It typically forages on insects, usually alone. It will, however, join mixed species flocks and readily pursues fleeing crickets, cicadas, and other fleshy prey. Its nest is a flimsy twig cup, often lined with fresh leaves. It is often placed inside a thicket. Each year, a pair often nests close to the main house and are observed throughout the year.



Squirrel Cuckoo with nesting material

Below-Cuckoo with its long, squirrel-like tail



Cuckoo taking a moth caterpillar to its hidden nest.

Butterfly-Golden White (*Melete polyhymnia*)-Amidst the bewildering array of colorful butterflies is this special pair. To date, the only records in Honduras originate from Emerald Valley and have only been observed during the mistflower season. The sexes are dimorphic, with the female being golden orange. Known hostplants for this genus are mistletoes. We look forward to seeing them each year in January.



Female Golden White



Male Golden White

Plant- Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta*)-The native porterweed is quite a small plant that bears a small amount of very small flowers. We likely have forms/hybrids of *S. mutabilis* and *S. jamaicensis* which both grow to be sizeable shrubs with large flowers. Both color forms attract a nice assortment of both butterflies and hummingbirds. Rare species of hummingbirds that have been observed on these flowers include; Sparkling-tailed Woodstar, Mexican Violet-Ear, and Blue-throated Goldentail. Rare species of butterflies include; Green-celled Cattleheart (*Parides childrenae*), Harmonia Tigerwing (*Tithorea harmonia*), Tucuti Flasher (*Urbanus tucuti*), and Orange-rimmed Skipper (*Apyrrothrix chalybea*). They are particularly popular with crepuscular skippers where they are quite the challenge to photograph.

Both color varieties bloom all year at Emerald Valley and plants can be found throughout many of the gardens. There are two gardens in the flat area that are almost entirely filled with porterweed where large gatherings of butterflies and hummingbirds can be found.



A large cluster of purple porterweed.



Male Salvin's Emerald on pink porterweed.



Right-Carystoides sp. One of many crepuscular skippers that can be seen feeding on porterweed at dusk.



Tucuti Flasher on pink porterweed.

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.

“Along with my friend, Brian Watkins, I stayed with you for 2 weeks at the end of January 2025 and what a wonderful time we had.

Emerald Valley is a slice of paradise, surrounded on all sides by mountains covered by pristine forest. The efforts that Robert and Olivia have made to conserve, protect biodiversity, and create a sustainable private reserve are gargantuan and a credit to them. As butterfly enthusiasts, we could wake up and explore the Mistflower, Porterweed and Bitter Vine gardens during the day with huge quantities of butterflies parading before our cameras. There are more good butterflying areas in the near vicinity as well as opportunities for other wildlife enthusiasts, especially birders.

They gave us a lovely room in the house to stay which was spacious and comfortable with all mod cons. Everybody there was friendly and helpful. The range and quality of Olivia's food was out of this world - I usually lose a bit of weight on my trips but put some on this time! It was always a joy to visit the cozy little café at meal times.

The overall atmosphere was relaxing and laid back but there is continual work going on behind the scenes. Robert was an exemplary guide.

He knew the name of every butterfly that we saw (in English and Latin!), was very good at spotting something interesting, and shared



our enthusiasm. He may appear calm and laid back but he's the first up a tree if there's a rare species to photograph! His easy-going nature and quiet sense of humor was a pleasure. Even on the days where rain stopped play, he would help us to identify the species that we had photographed.

The antics of Butch the dog and Tuki the Toucan just added to the fun and homely environment of this wonderful place.

Honduras is a beautiful and relatively unspoiled country; long may it stay that way. I hope Robert and Olivia will accept us both back for another trip soon.

Dave Griffiths-Portsmouth, U.K.

“A friend and I had the pleasure of staying at Emerald Valley in January for 2 weeks of butterfly fun.

Robert and Olivia welcomed us and into their home, where we were treated to first class hospitality including comfortable lodgings and 3 freshly prepared meals each day, nothing was too much trouble.

Robert's knowledge is mind blowing, he was always very happy and willing to help locate and identify species for us to photograph of which the number was breathtaking.

The mist flower garden is a marvel, attracting literally hundreds of different species with the surrounding parts of the valley providing different habitat and food plants for a large variety of other butterflies.

It's truly an amazing place in every sense, a real butterfly haven, and I feel so lucky and thankful to have experienced it and very much look forward to returning again in the future.”

Brian Watkins-Sussex, U.K.



“Although I have made three trips to Honduras for butterflies, this past January was the first time I had an opportunity to stay at one of the cabins at Emerald Valley. Sue, one of my Florida butterfly watching friends, and I booked it for the Honduras Butterfly Festival 2025 extension trip.

Until you visit Emerald Valley, you can’t appreciate the logistics of getting building materials from the main road down into Emerald Valley to build anything of substance. The cabin is definitely ‘of substance!’ Perched in the treetops with a wide welcoming front porch, the first thing we noticed were feeders welcoming butterflies and birds. The comfy chairs make it the perfect place to not only watch feeders but also for your morning coffee or evening cocktail. The cabin is furnished with two comfortable beds and a nice bathroom. It also has internet and many outlets for charging electronics. The large expanse of glass, looking out onto the porch and feeders and surrounding jungle, make the cabin a very enjoyable place to stay. The steps from the cabin take you directly into the butterfly garden or you can get an early start on the trails. Neither my friend nor I had ever had a personal chef, but Olivia filled that role perfectly.

We very much enjoyed the meals she and her family prepared with locally sourced foods. Robert and Olivia make every effort to see you enjoy your visit at Emerald Valley. I highly recommend a stay at the cabin. Robert has already started a second duplex cabin and they have even bigger plans for Emerald Valley. I wish them well with their new venture.”



Linda Cooper-Florida, U.S.

“I highly recommend the Honduras Butterfly Festival hosted by Robert and Olivia Gallardo. I attended the 2025 festival and had the time of my life. The Emerald Valley property with its gardens was stunning and the butterfly diversity is nothing short of amazing. The friends, family, and staff made me feel like family.

You can see well over one hundred species in a single day and there are always exciting discoveries, including new property or even Honduras records. There are also day trips to nearby parks which host a different array of species. All butterfly enthusiasts would enjoy this festival, whether you are a novice or an expert. Robert and the staff will point out all the significant species and what makes them special.

The accommodation is good, and the food is great. The experience will improve with ongoing property enhancements. The weather in January is very pleasant with cool mornings and warm afternoons. In addition to butterflies, there is an abundance of other beautiful life forms to appreciate.

I plan to go back to the festival and would like to attend other butterfly tours to other parts of the world.”

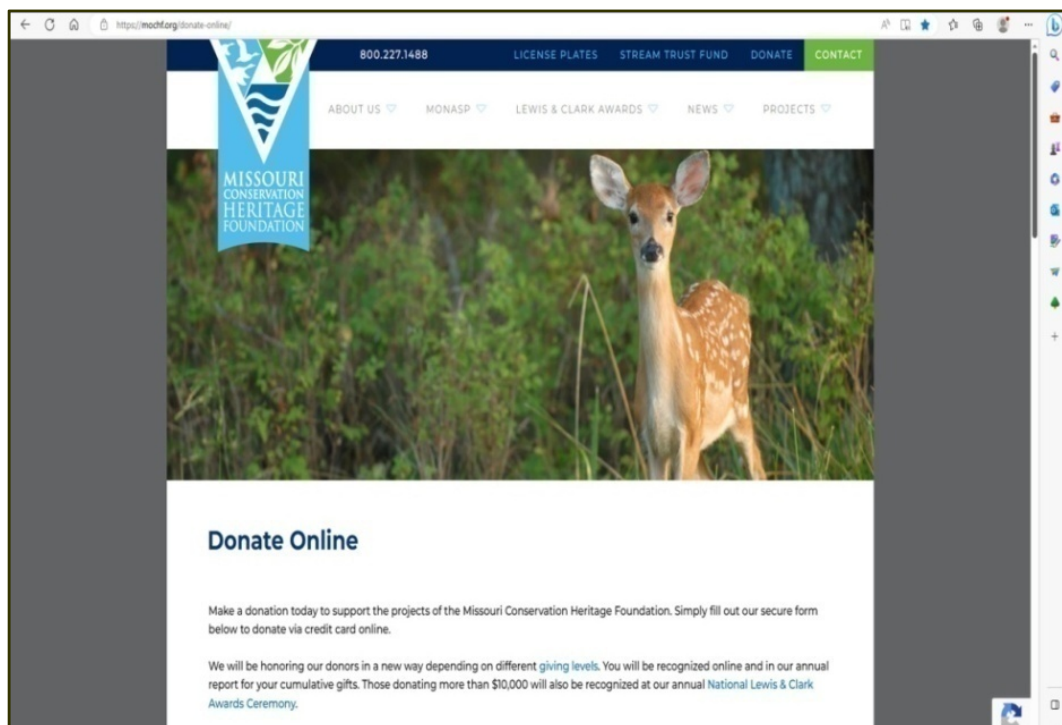


***Mark Otnes-
Tucson, U.S.***

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:

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!