

Honduras' Emerald Valley | May 1-7, 2026

Trip Report by Robert Gallardo



Compiled by guide Robert Gallardo with local guide Mattis Pagany, and participants Jeff, Kathy, Kathleen, Lenore, and Harold



The May tour marked the second trip to Emerald Valley with Naturalist Journeys. Everyone enjoyed this 'unpack once' destination and the evergreen forests of this private reserve nestled in the foothills of Lake Yojoa. Although officially named 'Emerald Valley International Butterfly Center,' the site boasts nearly 200 species of birds, many small mammals, and an exuberant pre-montane forest comprised of exuberant flora. Additional forests on private lands about the 85 acres that comprise Emerald Valley.

Amidst the seven countries of Central America is Honduras, and to this day it remains one of the hidden gems in the world of nature tourism. Although known primarily as a diving destination, it has been shown that Honduras' mainland is rich in flora and fauna. It harbors over 800 species of birds, 1,300+ butterflies, 10,000 vascular plants, and abundant endemic reptiles and amphibians. Add to the fact that parks and reserves receive very few tourists, and a visitor often has an entire mountain to oneself. The great pine-oak forests of North America terminate as large swaths across the Honduran landscape where countless numbers of migrants spend the winter. During this trip, we focused visits in areas around the species-rich Lake Yojoa region where we found nearly 200 species of birds and a few mammals.



Friday May 1 Arrivals | Travel to Emerald Valley, Lake Yojoa

Today the adventure began for Harold, Lenore, Jeff, Kathleen, and Kathy. Summer (the dry season) had finally arrived in Honduras and we would have clear skies and warm days. After arriving in San Pedro Sula, we headed south toward Lake Yojoa. The flat Sula Valley, filled with agricultural fields and villages, slowly gave way to foothills with forested slopes as we made the climb toward the lake basin. We stopped at a large fruit stand along the way where a wide variety of bananas and other fruits were sold. We reached Lake Yojoa and made our way westward toward the small town of Peña Blanca. From there, it was a stone's throw away to the village of La Union Suyapa which is located just up the road from our destination. We switched into a 4WD truck and made the quick descent into Emerald Valley. Enchanted Peak, the lake, Deer Island, and Cerro Azul Meambar National Park were all in view from the high point in the road.

We were greeted with cool towels and a welcome drink by the lodge staff. After a brief orientation, everyone was shown to their spacious rooms. It was time to unpack once and enjoy the stay. After a short break, we went out for our first walk to see what was stirring. A White-bellied Emerald and Rufous-tailed Hummingbird were foraging on a purple Porterweed by the outside dining area. When these bigger species were gone, the smaller Stripe-throated Hermit and Canivet's Emerald would sneak in to feed. The stately Common Squirrel Cuckoo appeared and graced us with its presence. Both the Short-tailed Hawk and Gray Hawk soared past; both being residents of these woods. A pair of Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Chestnut-headed Oropendolas, and a few Montezuma Oropendolas all appeared and would be our constant companions while staying there. Both the Spot-breasted and Altamira Orioles were seen along the access road, the latter being uncommon in the area. A Spot-breasted Wren was foraging in a nearby thicket, allowing for great views of this otherwise secretive bird. The colorful Crimson-collared Tanager appeared and sang atop a large Piper shrub before the day ended. As night approached, we dined indoors and enjoyed the cool mountain air.

Saturday May 2 | Emerald Valley-all day

Lake Yojoa is bordered by two national parks; Cerro Azul Meambar on the east and Santa Barbara on the west. Both have different geologic origins and corresponding flora and fauna. The evergreen broadleaf forest at Emerald Valley remains humid, and green, for most of the year. With nearly eleven feet of rain per year, this part of the lake sees a brief dry season from mid-February to mid-May.



We had a relatively early breakfast and enjoyed the bird sounds that echoed from the surrounding forests. A pair of Little Tinamous was sure to let us know they were present with their tremulous calls. Some gourmet, locally grown coffee, banana bread, and a full breakfast was a great way to start the day. In both trucks we headed up to the gate near the main road where we would start our morning walk. Mattis, a young budding bird watcher and nature enthusiast, is learning how to be a guide and studying Biology and would join us every day. His keen ears and eyes would help us detect more wildlife.

In the open fields we saw several Blue-black Grassquits, including a pair of males that jumped up and down from atop dried corn stalks. A pair of the noisy Rufous-backed Wrens appeared, being resident of more open areas and around villages. Four Blue-gray Tanagers appeared on a leafless tree, followed by two colorful Yellow-winged Tanagers. Over a month ago, Robert discovered a pair of Northern Emerald-Toucanets that were beginning to nest in a small, dead tree not far from the gate. We set up the scope on the nest cavity and waited patiently until one poked its head out. It was worth the wait to see this special bird that is more common at higher elevations. Nearby were three more and it appeared they too were looking for a tree cavity in which to nest. A lone Crested Caracara soared past along with several White-crowned Parrots and White-fronted Parrots. A pair of Red-lored Amazons followed suit. In a large, leafless tree several Masked Tityras appeared and perched long enough for scope views. A pair of Buff-throated Saltators emitted their sweet-sounding songs. Further up the road we found a pair of Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and Boat-billed Flycatchers; both nesting in the tall trees. Descending into Emerald Valley we came across a pair of Barred Antshrike skulking in the thickets. A perched Red-billed Pigeon was spotted along the ridgeline as we reached the lodge.

We had lunch then some downtime as we waited for the midday temperatures to come down. By the multipurpose building we found a female Green-breasted Mango feeding on purple Porterweed which is a great sighting for this site. In the late afternoon we took a walk off the property going in the other direction. The resident Zone-tailed Hawk soared past, searching for an unwary victim. A handsome male Gartered Violaceous Trogon was encountered as well as a few Black-headed Saltators. We got good looks at both the Turquoise-browed and Lesson's Motmots which are both common on the property. We reached the Chestnut-headed Oropendola colony where they were actively coming and going as they brought food for their chicks. A couple of



female Giant Cowbirds were inspecting nests to see if any were fit to lay their eggs. We saw a Keel-billed Toucan soaring from a nearby ridge to Enchanted Peak. Then another joined it and then five more arrived. It was a great show of color. On the way back to the lodge we encountered a Golden-olive Woodpecker, a male Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Sepia-capped Flycatcher. A big flock of Montezuma Oropendolas flew past us to end a wonderful day of bird watching.

We returned to the lodge for a bit of rest before doing our species list and dinner. The Short & Sweet trip was off to a great start.

Sunday May 3 | Boat Ride on Lake | Walk to Skipper Pass

A visit to the Lake would not be complete without having done a boat ride. After breakfast, we did the short trip to the nearby canal where we met the boat captain, Nelson. We set out and slowly cruised the canal which is lined with floating aquatic vegetation and forest on both sides. Many wild Muscovy Ducks were foraging inside the flooded forest. We found numerous species of egrets and herons as we got closer to more open water. Upon entering the lake itself, we first cruised along the western edge. This is where the steep, forested slopes drop all the way down to the waters' edge. The limestone spires are so picturesque. We came across a group of Proboscis Bats clinging to a large boulder just over the water and right next to them was an active Black Phoebe nest. The first nest they built recently fell into the water and they quickly rebuilt a new one. We eventually reached a spot where the Emerald Valley properties nearly reach the lakes' edge. Thanks to many donations, 85 acres of rainforest have been acquired and protected.

We turned around and cruised along the north shore. We began to see many graceful Snail Kites as they soared to and fro, occasionally plucking Apple Snails from just under the waters' surface. The Lake is chalk-full of most species of crakes and rails that occur in Honduras, but seeing them is a different story. We had a spot to see the Yellow-breasted Crake but wanted to find a second one. And we did. The tiny, chick-sized bird came crawling out along the edge of the floating vegetation and we were afforded excellent views of this elusive, prized bird. We also heard both the Ruddy and Gray-breasted Crakes at different spots. We spotted a soaring Lesser Yellow-headed Vulture. Numerous Least Grebes were found, tucked away in still waters. Behind some large trees and



along a muddy shoreline were two Southern Lapwings. Right where we were going to turn around we found a small flock of the handsome Fulvous Whistling-Ducks that were resting along an inlet shoreline. As we were returning we saw a Least Bittern that flew into a stand of cattails. We went that direction to try and get a closer look and it flew out again. This is generally a difficult bird to see in Honduras and it was a terrific way to end the morning.

We returned to the lodge in time for another delicious lunch. It was another hot day so we waited for it to cool down before the afternoon's activity. We took a short hike to a place called 'Skipper Pass' to see what was stirring. It is named so because of the wide variety of crepuscular skipper butterflies that Robert has detected during the rainy season. A few Collared Aracaris were foraging fairly low in the understory, allowing for good views of our third species of toucan. We always keep an eye out for any unusual butterfly and we were able to find a Clearwinged Mimic-White, the only Sulphur that is transparent and mimics the distasteful Glasswings. We reached the pass and it was quiet but we did enjoy this cool, shady forest.

We returned to the lodge and had some downtime before enjoying another delicious dinner, followed by another one of Olivia's famous desserts. Afterwards, we found a Common Pauraque which perches by a light every day throughout the year. We ended another fulfilling day at Lake Yojoa.

Monday May 4 | Los Naranjos Archaeology Site

Each day offers a new experience during this Short & Sweet trip. After breakfast we took both trucks to the nearby Los Naranjos archaeological site. We dropped off Lenore and Harold who would take a much shorter walk with Mattis along a forested access road. The remainder of us went through town to reach the main entrance to the site.

Around the visitor's center itself the bird life was teeming. Social Flycatchers, Great Kiskadees, Montezuma Oropendolas, and Yellow-winged Tanagers were all observed. A male Red-legged Honeycreeper was seen well through the scope. A pair of Cinnamon-bellied Saltator was singing their sweet melody. Jeff spotted an adult Bare-throated Tiger-Heron tucked back in the flood forest near the lake's edge. An uncommon species for this



area is the Cinnamon Hummingbird, and one was seen feeding on purple Porterweed. A pair of perched Olive-throated Parakeets was observed before we began our walk. We headed along a detoured route since the gravel pathways were still flooded. The colorful Turquoise-browed Motmot was seen numerous times. Kathy spotted a Lineated Woodpecker; one of the giant species. A pair of the handsome Gray Hawks started lifting up, emitting their screams. Upon reaching the elevated boardwalk, we found a pair of Northern Waterthrush walking on it, foraging amidst fallen leaves. We continued down the scenic boardwalk amidst towering coral trees, most of which were laden with different epiphytes and Spanish Moss. A colorful male Gartered Trogon was found perched high in the subcanopy. Several woodcreepers were also observed including the Northern Barred, Streak-headed, and Ivory-billed. Several flycatchers were observed including the Common Tody-Flycatcher, Yellow-olive Flatbill, and the migrant Great Crested Flycatcher. The bulk of migratory birds had already departed Honduras but we did see many Common Yellowthroats in the marsh, a Black-and-white Warbler, a pair of American Redstarts, Northern Yellow Warbler, and two Magnolia Warblers. Many of these were decked out in their breeding plumage and would soon depart as well. As we reached the end of the walk we found a black morph Short-tailed Hawk. After crossing a small suspension bridge we hooked back up with Mattis, Lenore, and Harold. They also saw several woodcreepers and others including the Ringed and Green Kingfishers.

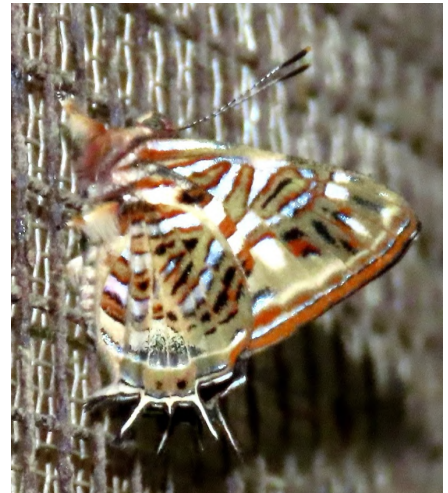
We returned to Emerald Valley for a nice lunch and some downtime. In the afternoon, we hung around the lodge and enjoyed a nice variety of hummingbirds and butterflies from the front porch of Robert and Olivia's house. A Long-billed Starthroat made an occasional appearance to feed on large, red *Costus* blossoms, a plant native to eastern Honduras.

We had dinner after it cooled down and did the species list. A Mottled Owl was heard calling close by outside and we went out to find it. It was perched fairly low in a giant fig tree. We concluded another fabulous day with this nice sighting.

Tuesday May 5 | Luna del Puente | El Cajon

Today we were off for an all-day adventure to explore two completely different areas and their respective ecosystems.

We headed out in a minivan and within an hour reached a private reserve called 'Luna del Puente.'



We started our walk right around the parking lot. Right away we heard two Black-headed Trogons calling and it took a bit of searching to find one with their vocalizations being so ventriloquial in quality. A pair of Rose-throated Becard was seen foraging in the citrus orchard and adjacent trees. Over the past month or so we had watched them build the large ball-shaped nest in a nearby *Cecropia*, and it was now finished. We started heading down a trail and came across a Sepia-capped Flycatcher and a Long-billed Hermit. From quite the distance we could hear the loud song of the Bright-rumped Attila; a large and ornate flycatcher. It is heard far more often than seen, but this one would not escape Mattis' keen eyes. We got scope views of this magnificent species. Mattis heard the faint call of another canopy-dwelling flycatcher. This one, however, was not so big. It belonged to the diminutive Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet. Robert knew one of its vocalizations quite well and whistled it. In no time at all, this splendid bird came into view, having the appearance of a Bananaquit and Social Flycatcher.

We did a loop back to the main area then started to head down another trail. A singing male Blue-black Grosbeak was perched in the shade of the subcanopy. A pair of the lovely Golden-hooded Tanagers was seen foraging in a large *Miconia* tree. The whiny call of a Long-billed Gnatwren originating from a thicket caught our attention and it took some time to find it. We came across a White-collared Manakin lek that was at least 70 feet and we could see a male jumping around. We reached the bridge where a pair of the pint-sized Tody Motmot is often found. We waited patiently to see if one would appear, and it paid off. We were afforded outstanding views of this often secretive bird. We had a successful morning and returned to the restaurant for a tasty lunch. We said 'bye' to this reserve and continued on our way.

Not on the scheduled itinerary for this first year was a visit to an area that harbors dry forest and a chance of seeing the endemic Honduran Emerald. The area is home to the country's largest hydroelectric dam (called 'El Cajon') and the place where the last population of the Emerald was discovered. We reached a security gate that was the official entrance to the dam area then took a turnoff onto a dirt road. We stopped at a spot where we had seen the Emerald on previous trips and it didn't take long for one to appear. They were feeding primarily on blooming bromeliads that grew on the oaks and other trees. Being the dry season, these plants likely represented the principal food source. A Brown-crested Flycatcher was also there and seen well. We continued up toward another good spot where deciduous forest and dry pine-oak converge. Within minutes we found a



Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, a Grace's Warbler, and several more Honduran Emeralds. Just up the road a bit more we also found a pair of nesting Streak-backed Oriole, Acorn Woodpecker, and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. As we were starting to make our way back to the paved road we spotted a soaring juvenile King Vulture. It was likely the same one we found there a few weeks ago. We departed the dry forest and were quite satisfied to have seen the country's only endemic bird.

We returned to Emerald Valley for some R&R before doing the checklist and dinner.

Wednesday May 6 | Meambar N.P. | Chocolate Factory

The last day at the Lake would be spent visiting a national park and savoring gourmet chocolates. What better combination is there? We travelled toward the park and made our first stop atop a small reservoir called 'Yure.' From atop the earthen dam we had a view over the lake and spillway. Northern Rough-winged Swallows flew to and fro. Inside a patch of trees we found a Cinnamon Hummingbird, a pair of Yellow-bellied Elaenia, Piratic Flycatcher, and Red-legged Honeycreepers. We got close, eye level views of the stunning male honeycreeper. Mattis' keen eyes spotted a perched Amazon Kingfisher and we observed it in the scope. A Gray Hawk was lifting off in the distance. We continued up the road and made our way to the visitor's center. This is one of the few protected areas in the country that is easily accessible and the necessary infrastructure to receive visitors. Nearby is a small canopy tower so we climbed it to see what was stirring. On the way up we heard a Mayan Antthrush calling very close. We stopped at one of the levels hoping it would come into view but alas it remained hidden in the dense vegetation. We did see a lone female Red-crowned Ant-Tanager. What otherwise is typically a good spot to see birds at canopy level turned out to be quite quiet. We headed down and made our way to the trail that leads to the waterfall. Near the visitor's center we found the pair of Keel-billed Toucans nesting high up in a hollow. As we neared the river we noticed some movement in the foliage against the far bank. It was a Canada Warbler foraging close to a pair of the resident Golden-crowned Warbler. We reached the falls where the breeze from the cascade made it quite refreshing. While there, a pair of the giant White-collared Swifts came zooming in from above and landed on the mossy rock wall outside of the falls in plain view. They were there long enough to get really good views. How lucky was that!? We started making our way back up the trail and encountered a lovely Rusted Clearwing Satyr; a transparent member of butterflies that are usually plain brown. We relaxed at the outside deck of the restaurant and ordered lunch. We had a view of the lake in the distance. Several times, a male Violet Sabrewing came into the feeders, showing off its metallic purple color.



While we were eating, a handsome male Collared Trogon appeared from a nearby ravine and we got great looks at it.

Our visit to this park had concluded and we started making our way down the mountain. A visit to the lake wouldn't be complete without stopping at a chocolate making facility. We went to the Yojoa Chocolate Company where Elmer and a small staff concoct award winning delicacies. They pride themselves on having tree-to-bar chocolates; all naturally flavored bars with some twelve varieties in all. One of the newest is made from the wild anise avocado. Sounds funky, but it was delicious. Elmer gave a wonderful explanation of how chocolates (yes, brown and white) are extracted from caca o beans then we were offered nibs of each flavor. It was hard to decide which to pick. Most of us walked out with a small stack of beautifully packaged bars, each adorned with a bird photo. We thanked Elmer and made our way back to Emerald Valley.

It was a warm afternoon, so we had some downtime. Some enjoyed the birds from the house deck or the patch of Porterweed near the multi-purpose area. Jeff continued to photograph a nice variety of butterflies. Before dinner, we met to do the final checklist and have a recap of the trip highlights. Everyone was delighted to have been guests at Emerald Valley.

Thursday May 7 | Departures

We headed out early to make the drive to San Pedro Sula. We all said our 'good-byes' and hoped to see each other again.

Trip Highlights:

Jeff-Yellow-breasted Crane, Long-tailed Metalmark, perched White-collared Swifts, and the two Sarota butterflies. Was happy to have finally made it to Honduras. Loved seeing 11 blue Morphos on one feeder.

Kathy-Boardwalk at Los Naranjos; that place was 'gorgeous.' Had so many Lifers. Loved hearing the chachalacas each morning.

Kathleen-Loved seeing all the motmots, especially the Tody. Liked seeing motmots from the cabin deck. Amazon Kingfisher. Enjoyed seeing birds that were seen on other trips. Special moments-early mornings on the cabin deck. Loved visit to chocolate factory.

Lenore-Really enjoyed all the meals. Watching Snail Kites eating snails, wasp-like dragonfly, walk with Mattis.

Harold-Seeing the perched swifts at the waterfall, Gray Hawk with basilisk, different types of cicadas, and Emerald Toucanet on nest. Really enjoyed the boat ride.

Mattis-Least Bittern in flight. Yellow-bellied Tyrannulet and seeing all four species of vultures in one day. Dry forest is favorite place.

Robert-Seeing perched swifts, Yellow-breasted Crane, and flying Least Bittern.