

TRIP REPORT

**Mayan Butterfly Adventure seasoned with Birding & Culture
Yucatan & Chiapas, Mexico with Monarch extension
1-18 November, 2014**

**with a group of 12 butterfly enthusiasts from UK, led by Mike Williams
one of the leaders of the West Midlands Branch of Butterfly Conservation & BC EIG
plus Andrea and Gabor, organizers and tour guides
of Ecotours Kondor Ecolodge & Worldwide Travel Services,
and local drivers and guides**



Not many people realize that Mexico is not just the wintering place of hundreds of millions of incredible Monarch butterflies, but also host to almost 10 percent of the total butterfly species of the entire globe! That is close to 1800 species which means a hard to beat diversity. What is more, butterflies often occur in great number as well, so with good timing and some luck you can end up with a terrific list of butterflies during a 2 week long trip visiting various habitats. Our tour through the Land of the Mayas took us to some of the great butterfly hotspots among fascinating Mayan ruins in Yucatan and Chiapas, two contrastingly different areas. Beside butterflies we saw some breathtaking birds including many endemics, colourful wildflowers, various mammals, plus interesting amphibians and reptiles. Chiapas alone has one of the greatest biodiversity in not just in Mexico, but in the entire Americas: there are more than 100 species of amphibians, 700 species of birds, more than 50 species of mammals and just over 200 species of reptiles.

We visited some famous and some less known Mayan archaeological sites surrounded by lush forests and full of many great species. We also explored various other habitats: broadleaved and pine forests, wetlands, mangroves, Caribbean beaches, all with their own unique rich flora and fauna, including many endemics as well.

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From Chiapas we flew over to Mexico city and continued the tour to the Western Highlands to the wintering grounds of the Monarch butterflies.

We were not really lucky with the weather: just before the beginning of the tour huge storms decimated the butterfly populations and we regularly had showers or clouded days especially during the first half of the tour. Once we had sunny days we had a lot of great stuff around.

Fact File

- 2 weeks in the Yucatan and Chiapas visiting famous Mayan sites and nature reserves,
- 4 nights in the Monarch area in the Western Highlands,
- start and finish in Cancun,
- using 9 bases in the Yucatan and Chiapas and 2 at the Monarch area to maximize visited places and possible species

Highlights

- travelling along the Caribbean shore, Sian Kaan Reserve
- searching out butterflies among Mayan ruins
- boat trip to Yaxchilan on the Guatemalan border
- visit to Calakmul, one of the most remote and wildest areas in Yucatan
- visit to Monte Azul Biosphere Reserve with Scarlet Macaws and the unique Montebello Lakes
- search for butterflies at and around the most famous waterfalls of Mexico
- wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians at different habitats
- plenty of interesting butterfly species including several great endemics and near endemics
- 4 night extension to see the incredible sight of overwintering Monarchs



looking for new butterflies

Accommodations:

Yucatan and Chiapas

- 1 night Puerto Morelos at the Caribbean seashore
- 1 night Tulum
- 1 night at Calakmul,
- 2 nights at Palenque,
- 1 night at Yaxchilan,
- 2 nights at Monte Azul,
- 2 nights close to Comitan
- 1 night at San Cristobal area
- 1 night at Palenque

The Monarch extension:

- 2 night in Tlalpujahuá,
- 2 night in Valle de Bravo

Activity level

Generally we had easy to moderate walks in the Yucatan and Chiapas. But in the hills, especially at the Monarch sites we had some more difficult and some demanding trails.

At some places we had to go by horses up in the hills. Some areas in the Yucatan and Chiapas were very humid and hot, specially because we started the tour after some huge rains and storms in the area, which was not doing too much good for the butterflies. This type of weather effected the number of butterflies seen. There were not so many large groups of them as usual. Surprising on the other hand in the Western Highlands weather was quite nice and sunny, but sometimes cool, even cold in the mornings and evenings due to the much higher altitude. We also had occasional rain and stronger wind there.

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Itinerary

Day 1 November 1st, 2014

Upon the group's arrival early afternoon to **Cancun** on the Yucatan Peninsula they were waited by Andrea and Gabor and we were all transferred to the small fishing village of Puerto Morelos which was a bit more than half an hour drive from the airport.

Some of us enjoyed the view of the Caribbean sea from the terrace of the hotel, some from the rooms.

Steve arrived later just in the evening, so when he arrived and the group was together we had our dinner and discussed next day's program.

It is also important to mention that some days before the group arrived we had huge storms here which was worrying, because it was so strong that it could wash out a lot of butterflies.

As for the birds right on the first day we could observe some at the hotel and at nearby areas, especially at the sea-side such as **Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Double-crested Cormorant, Grey Plover, Semi-palmated Plover, Laughing Gull, Royal Turn, Sandwich Turn.**

Overnight: **Hacienda Morelos, Puerto Morelos**

Day 2 November 2nd, 2014

On the first morning just around the hotel we started to look for butterflies and found the following species:

Little Yellow, Ceraunus Blue, Eastern Tailed-Blue, Common Lemmark. Nymphalids were represented by **Gulf Fritillary, Theona Checkerspot, Phaon Crescent, Common Buckeye, White Peacock** and what a surprise even the first **Monarch!!:-)** We also noted a **Guatemalan Skipper.**

We also saw some **birds**, funnily the very first one was a **Eurasian Collared Dove** which escaped from European Winter as well. We also had **Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling** and **Least Sandpiper.** But of course the species we mentioned at the first day were also around in good numbers.



Spot-celled Sister



Theona Checkerspot

After breakfast, we went out to some nearby flowery clearings and dirt-roads. Although Puerto Morelos is close to Cancun, it is surprisingly green and covered by mainly deciduous and semi-evergreen tropical forests. We had a great start with **Square-spotted Yellowmark, Burnt Chocolate Hairstreak, Carolina Satyr** and **Queen.** Everybody has managed to see well and some of us also photographed **Common Lemmark, Cloaked Scintillant** and a beautifully

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coloured **Purple-washed Eyemark**. Some of the widespread **Nymphalids** we already managed to see here such as **Erato Heliconian, Zebra Heliconian, Spot-celled Sister** and **Common Mestra**.

We also admired an **Eastern-tailed Blue, Confusing Sister** (which is actually easy to confuse with one of the other Sisters), **Grey Cracker, Monarch, Pavon Emperor, Variegated Skipper, White Peacock, Guatemalan Skipper, Common Buckeye, Mexican Cycadian** and **Tabasco Yellow**.



Cloaked Scintillant



Purple-washed Eyemark

This area was the favorite birding area of Gabor and Andrea, kind of home patch since they leave less than half an hour away from every November till April. We saw here **Mangrove Vireo, Roadside Hawk, Squirrel Cuckoo, Red-Throated Anttanager, Altamira Oriole, Rose-throated Becard, Garthered Trogon** (formerly *Violecaous*), **Rufous-browed Peppershrike, Groove-billed Ani, Golden-fronted Woodpecker** and **Brown Jay**. We also got the first endemic bird species, a **Yucatan Jay!** The most common birds were **Tropical Kingbird, Tropical Mockingbird, Great Kiskadee, Magnolia Warbler, Great-tailed Grackle** and **Grey Catbird**. **Warblers** were represented by **Black-and-White, Palm, Yellow-throated** and **Black-throated Green Warbler**.

After returning to the hotel we started our journey south, travelling through Playa del Carmen and Tulum before having a late lunch at Coba. The lunch was a typical Mayan buffet-style food on a terrace from where we had a great view on Lake Coba. During the afternoon we visited our first Mayan archeological site which is not only interesting for the site itself, but it has many flowering trees and wildflowers to attract butterflies. But **Coba** also has shady trails among forested areas which provided a nice mix of different habitats and species. This time it was not very good for butterflies, but we saw here the following interesting new species: **Mexican Cycadian, Yellow-fronted Owl Butterfly** and **Dusky-Blue Groundstreak**.



Mexican Cycadian



Yellow-fronted Owl Butterfly

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We saw at the lagoon/lake **Ringed Kingfisher**, Ann saw 3 of them! And we saw **Snowy** and **Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Pied Grebe** and some **Vaux's Swifts**.
Of course **Black and Turkey Vultures** were almost everywhere. :-)

Unfortunately we were still not lucky with the weather, the storms before we started the tour were so heavy that a lot of butterflies were washed out, so we had hard time to find any! :-)
And some rains were still going and going which of course didn't help too much either. :-)

After the visit to Coba we returned in our van and went back to Tulum to our sea-side hotel. As Mexicans are so "precise" unfortunately with rooms we had to wait quite a bit, the receptionist were not really on the top of their job. They made a quite a confusion with who will get which room, but finally they sorted out things, however Andrea had to fight consistently so we could get what was booked and paid.

The hotel actually had a nice little beach and a snack bar, but this night they did not serve dinner, so this was our second surprise. When we learnt this Gabor had to run out and look for a restaurant where we could eat normally, not only snacks.

He found a good nearby one where we could just walk out so finally we had a nice dinner with a lovely breeze and the sound of the sea! :-)

By the time we finished the dinner everybody was quite tired because of the long traveling day before and the first day of butterflying and birding.

So finally we returned to our hotel and had a goodnight sleep. :-)

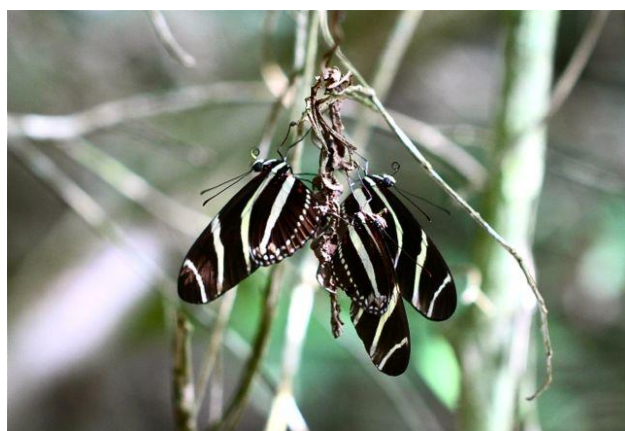
Overnight: **Tulum, Hotel Parayso Beach**

Day 3 November 3rd

After a well deserved rest we started with a nice coffee to go and then also at a petrol station we stopped to buy some biscuits and more coffees, just to be sure. Then we started our journey South in the direction of Belize. On the way we also stopped shortly alongside the Sian Kaan Biosphere Reserve to check some flowery bushes for butterflies.

During our travel we crossed some mangrove habitats and open areas where we saw **White-tailed Kite, Woodstork, Anhinga, Brown Pelican, White Ibis** and **Black-bellied Whistling Duck**. We also checked the air where we had the usual **Black Vultures** and **Turkey Vultures**, plus **Barn** and **Mangrove Swallows**.

Upon arrival to Felipe Carillo Puerto we stopped at a restaurant for a proper, but later than usual breakfast. Later on we continued further South, passed the beautiful Bacalar Bay and later we turned West just before Chetumal town, border town with Belize and capital of the Quintana Roo State of Mexico.



Zebra Heliconian



Mayan Crescent

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Around 1 o'clock after passing some typical small Mayan villages we arrived to Xpujil where we looked around a little bit alongside the entrance road of the Mayan site. We had here **Tropical Checkered Sipper** and **Small-spotted Flasher**. But since we couldn't find much more we decided to go a bit further till **Chicanna**. We had our packed lunches here and then we spent close to 2 hours with checking the bushes and trees.

We found here **Mexican Cycadian**, **Zebra Helconian**, **Theona Checkerspot**, **Erato Heliconian** and **Mexican Heliconian**.

On the trees we saw a **Squirrel Cuckoo**, in the bushes we had **American Redstart**, **Red-throated Anttanager**, **White-bellied Emerald**, **Cinnamon Hummingbird** and a loud **White-breasted Woodwren**.

Vireos were represented by **Mangrove**, **White-eyed** and **Yellow-throated Vireo**. We also had **Yellow**, **Black-and-White** and **Magnolia Warbler**. An interesting found was a **Grey-crowned Yellowthroat**.

Later on we decided to travel further towards **Calakmul Biosphere Reserve**, because our aim was to reach our hotel in time to check-in, leave our luggages in our rooms and go out before dark to witness an amazing wildlife wonder. We made it according to the plan of Andrea and Gabor so we were in time to make a short drive and than a walk. We arrived soon to a cave close to our accommodation from where millions of bats emerged in the evening before dusk, like a huge swarm. It was really an unforgettable, incredible experience!

Besides the bats which were **Mexican Free-tailed Bats** we heard a nearby **Collared Forrester Falcon** and seen **Brown Jays** and **White-fronted Parrots** as well.

After returning to our hotel we had a lovely dinner and during eating we enjoyed the sound of the **Howler Monkeys**. :-)

Overnight: **Calakmul Lodge**

Day 4 November 4th

We started the day with breakfast at 7.00 and around 8.00 fully packed we drove further inside the **Calakmul Biosphere Reserve**, where we spent half of the day.

We stopped at a trail and we spent about 2 hours with searching and photographing butterflies. Beside the common species such as **Erato**, **Zebra** and **Julian Heliconias** we also found **Blue-studded Skipper**, **Confusing Sister**, **Florida White** and a beautiful huge **Common Morpho**. Other species included **Dina Yellow** and **Many-banded Daggerwing**.

Metalmarks were represented by **Sailor's Lemmark** and **Common Lemmark**.

Further new species were later on **Bruised Zera**, **Pale-banded Crescent**, **Plain Satyr**, **Common Ur-Satyr**, **Alana White-Skipper** and **Dark-spotted Polythrix**.



Plain Satyr



Common Ur-Satyr

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Beside **Mexican Cycadian** we also found a strangely named Hairstreak which is called **Chutes-and-Ladders Hairstreak**. We noted again **Common Blue Morpho, Queen, Theona Checkerspot** and **Mexican Heliconian**.

Finally we also observed **Immaculate Brown-eye, Variegated Skipper, Coyote Cloudy-Wing Small-Flasher** and **Mayan Crescent**.

During searching butterflies of course we listened and watched several birds as well including **Pale-billed Woodpecker, Black-headed Trogon, Blue-diademed Motmot, White-bellied Emerald, Masked Tityra, Altamira Oriole, Blue-Grey Tanager, Grey-headed** and **White-winged Doves**.

We also had 2 **warbler species, Magnolia** and **Black-throated Green Warbler**, plus heard **Squirrel Cuckoo** and even **Royal Flycatcher** as well.

After this successful stop we continued further and soon we arrived to the visitor center. We discovered the attractive and very informative exhibition which represented very well the fauna and flora of the biosphere reserve and also the archeological treasures of Calakmul.

Beside the usual **Brown Jays** we also found the nicely coloured and endemic **Yucatan Jays**. Among the raptors we should note 2 new attractive species which were seen, **Bat Falcon** and **King Vulture**.

We also heard and saw a lovely **Ferruginous Pigmy Owl** and a regional endemic **Ocellated Turkey** which was high on some group member's wanted list.



Around noon we hit the road again and a bit more than an hour later we stopped at a restaurant at the beautiful **Silvituc Bay**. We ordered our fried fish and instead of sitting and waiting we discovered the area. We have found quite a lot of interesting butterflies and bird species as well.

Butterfly species included a beautiful **Mexican Fritillary, White-striped Longtail, Split-banded Owlet, Guatemalan Cracker, Banded-Orange Heliconia, Banded Peacock, Pipevine Swallowtail, Ceraunus Blue, White Peacock, Reakirt's Blue, Common** and **Tropical Buckeye, Theona Checkerspot, Tropical Checkered** and **Five-Banded Skippers** and **Mimosa Yellow**.

As for the birds we had 2 different **Woodpeckers, Ladder-backed** and **Golden-fronted**. Beside a **Clay-colored Thrush** there was a very contrasting **Baltimore Oriole** as well. **Ringed Kingfisher** hunted at a nearby bay while **Snail Kite** tried to catch a much slower prey. ☺ **Variable Seedeater** was among the lower vegetation while in the canopy we found **Social Flycatcher, Tropical Gnatcatcher** and **Summer Tanager**. There were some **Great Egrets** and several **Turkey Vultures** around as well.

While we were watching wildlife our lunch got ready. However it took some time and we also had to notice that some of the fish made an amazing evolutionary change and turned into chicken. Waitress of course said, that they were all fish, but it was obviously not quite that. :-)

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But, we could solve this problem and finally everybody got what they liked even if it was not exactly what we had ordered. But these things can happen at rural places where they are not so much used to foreign tourists.

We left the restaurant at around 2pm and continued our way toward Escarcega. Stopped at a petrol station to break the journey, use facilities and fill up the tank.

About 3.30 we left Escarcega and during the afternoon we traveled through extensive farmland and the **Usumacinta Marshes** which offer huge feeding areas for various **Hérons, Egrets, Wood Storks** and sometimes we can find here even **Jabiru**.

We had seen actually a lot of **Neotropical Cormorants, Groove-Billed Anis, Cattle Egrets, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Yellow-crowned Night** and **Little Blue Herons** and a few **Ospreys**. We had no luck with Jabiru though. 2 hours later we reached the bridge over the majestic River **Usumacinta**.

We arrived in the evening at Palenque and to our accommodation with simple Mayan style cabanas-bungalows. The good thing about this simple place is the location: it is alongside a small stream with beautiful trees and bushes which offer perfect butterfly and birding possibilities and it is already inside the Palenque National Park.

For dinner we just had to walk across the road, further up alongside the same stream where a locally very well known restaurant offers good food, a mix of Italian and Mexican kitchen. This place also offers accommodation mainly for backpackers. Live music is usually Central or South American latino music during the evenings.

Gabor and Andrea knew this place for a lot of years by now and guests usually like to eat here with a different atmosphere. It is great to be at a place surrounded by the jungle where there is always a chance to find something interesting. If you are lucky you can hear Howler Monkeys and during the day you can even see them while eating. And of course a lot of nice birds and butterflies can be around as well. After dinner since we had a long travel day we were tired and ready to return to our room and have a nice relaxing night.

Overnight: **Kin Balam Cabanas, Palenque**



Day 5 November 5th

After the long journey the day before this day we took it easy spending our time mainly in the vicinity of our accommodation. Our hotel ground was a perfect area to look for butterflies and birds as well since it was situated at the edge of the tropical rainforest. There were some open bushy areas to check out and also some shady patches, plus the stream where butterflies came down to sip moisture and take some minerals. According to the scientific data around 500 species have been recorded in this immediate area including several amazing species, a lot of different species of **Swallowtails, Beautymarks** and quite a lot of **Heliconid species**.

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But unfortunately we should not forget about the fact that some of the huge storms just before the trip effected this area as well. Supposedly many butterflies were washed out, so we had a hard time to find them!!! However we got some really good ones, but it was not easy at all. :- (Well, this is also part of nature and impossible to predict, especially unfortunately nowadays!

In the garden during the morning we found some really nice species such as **Small Beauty**, as the name refers a small, but beautifully marked Brushfoot/Nymphalid. :-) We also had **Common Blue Morpho**, which is always stunning and a **Yellow-Fronted Owl Butterfly**, which is just gorgeous. :-) Of course we had some more common ones which we mentioned during the previous days as well.



Small Beauty



Little Banner

We had breakfast at 8.00 at our favourite restaurant, where we had our dinner the night before. And as mentioned before it is a good place to see wildlife as well and indeed during breakfast we could watch several birds and other animals as well such as **Amazon Kingfisher, Northern Water-thrush, Aztec Parakeet, Hooded Warbler**. The latter one was brave enough even to come to the tables and almost checked out our breakfast! ☺ We also had **Grey Catbird** and other wildlife here included **Common Basilisk** and **Grey Squirrel**.

The famous **Mayan Archeological site of Palenque** was just a couple of kilometres away from our hotel so we visited it as well in the hope of seeing some different wildlife while admiring the stunning ancient Mayan city as well. By the help of Andrea we learnt some incredible things about Mayas, their culture, traditions, architecture, archeology and more. But since this tour was not mainly about archeology she just told her stories and talked about history before and after visiting the site.

Since the point was for everyone to see more wildlife we visited some of the trails inside the archeological site through the remnant patches of rainforest around the attractive ruins.

During the day we saw quite a few nice butterflies, a few species we had seen before such as **Emerald-patched Cattleheart** and **another unidentified Parides species, Banded Peacock, Variable** and **Starry Cracker, Pavon Emperor** and of course **Common Blue Morpho**.

Apart from these species we also found **Florida White, Eastern-tailed Blue, Pale Daggerwing, Carolina Satyr, Black-veined Mylon, Pasture-brown Skipper, Barred Yellow, Veined White-skipper, Huckberry Greenmark, Dull Scintillant, Mayan Crescent, Mimosa Skipper** and **Forrest Bluevent**.

We of course also saw some birds like **Common Black Hawk, Tropical Pewee, Social Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, Brown Jay, House Wren, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Yellow-**

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throated Vireo. We also had our first **Tennessee Warbler** during the tour and the usual **Magnolia** and **Yellow Warblers** plus a nice **Baltimore Oriole.** We also found **Common Yellowthroat** and **Yellow-throated Euphonia,** plus another nice new bird for the tour was **Yellow-winged Tanager.**



Common Black Hawk



Giant Beetles at Palenque

We had a late lunch after coming out of the archeological site and then we continued with looking for birds and butterflies outside the site alongside some more flowery bushes and trees.

At the end of the day we returned to our rooms, refreshed ourselves and went back to our favourite place for dinner with some good music and then returned to our rooms for the night.

Overnight: **Kin Balam Cabanas, Palenque**

Day 6 November 6th

After breakfast we traveled alongside the border of Mexico and Guatemala towards an area of the Lacandon indigenous people who were discovered by the outside world only during the 1940s. They live in remote areas which are usually great natural areas as well.

During our travelling we saw some **Cattle** and **Great Egrets.** We also had a few groups of **Groove-billed Anis, Tree Swallows** and **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** in the air. **Tropical Mockingbird** and **Great-tailed Grackle** was common alongside the road.

On the way we made a small detour and visited one of the areas nearby a Lacandon village. First we stopped on the Bonampak road where we found **Orange-barred Sulphur, White** and **Banded Peacock, Glassy-winged-, and Tropical Checkered Skippers.** We also added here **Guatemalan Catone** to our list.

To the bird list we added a beautiful **Passerini's Tanager.**



Tropical Checkered-Skipper



Fine-lined Stripe-streak

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We continued a little bit further and in the vicinity of another village we spent couple of hours to find some more species. But before that in a small local restaurant we had some quesadillas for lunch. In this area we had **Pale Daggerwing, Barred Yellow** and **Variable Cracker** first.

Among the several Skipper species we found many new ones such as **Stoll's Flat, Banded Skipper, Two-barred Flasher, Brilliant Blue Skipper, Square Bentwing, Violet-banded Skipper, Morning Glory Pellicia** and **Obscure Pellicia**.

We had again some **Common Lemmark** and **Common Blue Morpho**, but **Temple** and **Hoary Scintillant, Creamy Crescent, Black-bordered Tegosa** was new. But one of the nicest finding was a beautiful **Sky-Blue Greatstreak**.

We also had here **Little Banner, Four-spotted Sailor** and **Scarce Sister**. A few of us had seen a **Turquoise-spotted Navy 88**, which tried to steal the show, but majority of the group had to wait several more days to have a really good view of it at another place.

Erato, Julia and **Zebra Heliconians** were common, but we also found a **Fine-Lined Stripe-Streak**.

The last butterflies today at this site were **Plain Satyr, Zebra Cross-Streak** and **Eastern-tailed Blue**.

On the surrounding bushes and trees those who were interested could see **Wilson's** and **Magnolia Warbler, Green Honeycreeper, Buff-throated** and **Black-headed Saltators, Masked Tityra, Yellow-throated Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Baltimore Oriole** and a beautiful **Garthered Trogon**. We also had our first nice **Montezuma Oropendola!**

Close to the forest floor **Woodtrush, Swainson's Trush** and **Spot-breasted Wren** searched food, while in the sky **Black Vultures** circled.

Late afternoon we continued our way to Frontera Corozal where we had our accommodation alongside the Usumacinta River. We got our rooms and then went out a bit to see some more wildlife, but we had not too much time before dark.

Alongside the Usumacinta River we found **Grey-necked Woodrail** and **Spotted Sandpiper**. **Red-lorred Parrots** flew above the hotel's premises. We also saw a **Ferruginous Pygmy Owl** and heard a **Northern Potoo**.

While we were waiting for our dinner from our table we saw **Yellow-winged Tanager, Blue-Grey Tanager, Summer Tanager, Golden-fronted Woodpecker** and **Variable Seedeater** as well.

Overnight: **Escudo Jaguar Hotel, Frontera Corozal**



Highland Guan



Slaty-tailed Trogon female

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Day 7 November 7th

We had our breakfast at 7 o'clock, but because service was quite slow we could only start our excellent river journey just around 8.30.

This is a very interesting boat trip on the **Usumacinta River** down to the famous **Yaxchilan ruins**. This is one of the less visited, but most exciting and remote ruin complexes.

During this exiting boat tour we saw amazing forest alongside the river bank and spotted our first **Howler Monkeys**. One side of the river is Mexico and the other is Guatemala. We arrived to the entrance about 45 minutes later where we walked through a dense forest and then entered to the site through dark corridors of the so-called Labyrinth. We could feel almost like we were part of an Indiana Jones movie! ☺ We surely found a lot of **bats** roosting in the dark rooms. Unfortunately weather was still not with us, so we couldn't find a lot of butterfly species despite the fact that this site is usually quite special for Lepidoptera.

Close to one of the Mayan temples we found an aptly named **Temple Scintillant** again, also **Common Lemmark, Carolina Satyr** and of course **Banded Peacock**.

But we also found 2 new species **Glaucous Cracker** and **Orion Cecropian**.

On the other hand we had plenty of very attractive bird species at this beautiful area including lots of **Keel-billed Toucans** and **Collared Aracaris**. We also had **Black-headed Trogon** and **Black-faced Groesbeak**. We had an amazing view of a **Highland Guan** and also had very close encounter with a **White-whiskered Puffbird**. The show continued with **Masked Tityra** and a dashingly coloured **Blue-diademed Motmot** plus a **Montezuma Oropendula** with a nice golden tail.

Later on we had **Squirrel Cuckoo** and **Yellow-winged Tanager**. We found another trogon, which turned out to be a **Collared Trogon** and later on a **female Slaty-tailed Trogon** was seen as well.

Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Woodthrush, Grey Catbird and **Brown Jay** were all very common. We had a few **Red-lore Parrots, Black-headed Saltators, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** and **Black-cowled Orioles** as well.

Gabor also took a photo of a very distant raptor which much later when he finally checked the photo turned out to be a very rarely seen **Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle**.



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron



Black-and-White Hawk-Eagle

Around noon we started our boat trip back and upon arrival checked out and ordered our lunch. We continued our journey up to the **Montes Azules** around 3.00 in the afternoon. Stopped shortly at **Benemerito de las Americas** to fill up the tank which also gave an opportunity to visit restrooms and shopping a bit.

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As we left the main road the tarmac road deteriorated fast, but we managed to solve all the difficulties and before dark we arrived to our riverside lodge accommodation. We spent 2 nights here. After arrival we checked in and had a nice local dinner. During dinners we always had some night wildlife around, like some geckos, moths, lizards, frogs and we heard howler monkeys as well of course. :-)

Overnight: **Guacamayas Lodge, Chajul**

Day 8 November 8th

This day we spent without travelling at all, so we did not even touch the vehicle! :-)

This was a leisurely day with exploring the hotel grounds which had plenty of flowering plants, bushes and trees. Here we were at the fantastic **Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve** and this is the only place in Mexico where we can still find **Scarlet Macaws** flying around freely since this area is the last known breeding habitat for them. Although they are the most colourful birds of the region there are plenty more birds and of course butterflies for us to admire.



Sulphur



Glazed Pellicia

Before breakfast with those who were keen on birding as well we went out at 6.15 and found **Red-eyed Vireo, House Wren, Hooded Warbler, Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Mexican Long-Tailed Hermit** and several **Red-lored Parrots**.

There was **Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Masked Tityra, Yellow and Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart** and **Grey Catbird** as well. It was too early for butterflies but still we could find **Variable Cracker**.

We had breakfast between 8.00-9.00 and half of the group decided to venture out on a 3-hour-long boat tour. From the big river we branched off into smaller streams through amazing lush forests. Both the crystal clear water and the dense vegetation was stunning.

Those who went out saw **Osprey, Roadside Hawk** and **Bat Falcon. Brown-hooded Parrots** were new, but the real highlight was to see the first pair of **Scarlet Macaws!** :-)

We also saw **Plain Chachalacas** and had a few **egrets and herons**. The boat tour also produced 3 different **Kingfisher species** such as **Ringed, Amazon** and **Green**.

In the meantime the other part of the group put on the daily butterfly list **Variable Cracker** and **Common Morpho** and the usual **Carolina Satyr**.

We were united again at the lunch which was followed by a short siesta and then we walked out at 3.00 and spent a few hours with searching butterflies.

During this easy walk we found **Tropical Checkered Skipper, Orange-barred Sulphur, Broad-winged Skipper, Four-spotted Sailor, Banded** and **White Peacock** and **Zebra Heliconian**.

New species were in the tour **Black-patched Bluemark, Red-spotted Scrub Hairstreak, Apricot** and **Clouded Sulphurs, Vesta Crescent, Blomfield's Beauty, Yellow-bordered Owl Butterfly, White Morpho, Brown Longtail, Glazed Pellicia** and **Common Glasswing**.

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In the garden it was very common to see **Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird** and **Social Flycatcher**. In the air we saw **White-winged Swallows, Northern Rough-winged swallows, Barn Swallows** and **Vaux's Swifts** as well.

We also saw **Summer Tanager, Black-headed Saltator** and this was the only place where we also found **Yellow-tailed Oriole**.

During the afternoon we noted the following bird species: **Yellow-throated Euphonia, Northern Waterthrush, Great-tailed Grackle** and **Melodious Blackbird**.

We were quite happy that this time the whole group could see 2 pairs of **Scarlet Macaws** and also some **Montezuma Oropendolas**. Alongside the road we found **Green Heron** and **Bare-throated Tiger-heron** in a ditch. 3 pairs of **Brown-Hooded Parrots** flew across and surprisingly we had **Highland Guans** today as well. The only mammals we had today were **Howler Monkeys**.



Surprising visitor from the sky during dinner ☺ Happy and keen group ready for a boat trip

We returned to our rooms before dinner and then went to the restaurant for a drink and for a nice meal. During dinner a funny, unexpected thing happened from the roof something small dropped itself down directly on top of the head of one of us :-). Jenny was really surprised as she felt something landed on her head, but of course she could not see what it was. She was relaxed and just looked around and asked: "What has landed on my head??" We replied: "Oooh well, nothing just a nice tropical frog...so you can kiss it and it might happen that it will turn into a nice prince! ☺ This opportunity was passed, but we all tried to take a photo of the frog which seemed quite comfortable at its new place. :-)

Finally we made our list of butterflies and birds, laughed a bit and talked about the frog story and went to bed.

Overnight: **Guacamayas Lodge, Chajul**



Crimson Patch



Blomfield's Beauty

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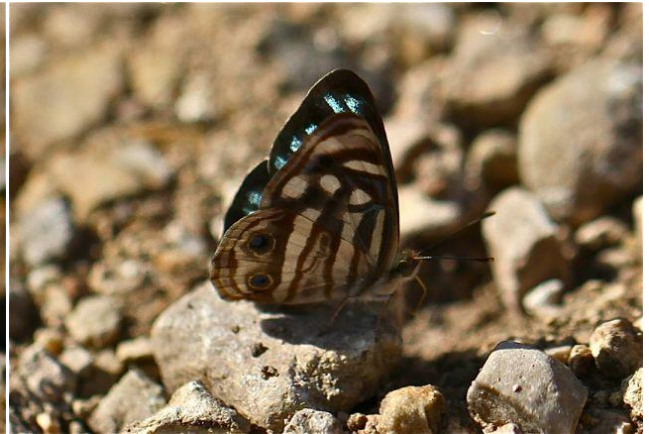
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Four-spotted Sailor

Day 9 November 9th

We had breakfast between 7.00-8.00 and left at around 8.30 for a 260km long journey. We continued towards the **Lagunas de Montebello** which are crystal-clear mountain lakes surrounded by pine woods. Here we spent about 1,5hours but it was unusually cold and finally it also started to rains. Again!! :-(We had fried fish at a local restaurant for lunch and continued our way during the light rain.

On the way towards Comitán we had a new bird species, a **White-tailed Hawk**. Finally later in the afternoon after crossing Comitán we arrived at our accommodation in the doorsteps of **El Chifflon cascades**. We quickly checked in and before dark visited the bottom part of the waterfalls and witnessed a huge group of **White-collared Swifts** flying through the enormous fall and resting on the cliffs. This was quite amazing because these little birds really had to find out how they can get through the waterfalls to the rock surface which meant a safe haven for them. Finally we had a nice dinner just a few steps away from our rooms.

Overnight: **Cabanas el Chifflon, Tzimol/Comitán**

Day 10 November 10th

This was a day again when we didn't have to get in the van! We spent some of our time visiting the forest trails around one of the highest and most powerful waterfalls of Mexico. From a vertical limestone rock the water of **Cascada El Chifflón** falls 120 metres and it has several side cascades as well. The colour of the water and an almost a mile-long series of smaller cascades and rapids were quite impressive. The refreshing water was like a magnet in the otherwise generally hot and dry area so beside the panoramic view we could enjoy several butterfly species.



Blue-eyed Sailor



Chestnut Crescent

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Most importantly finally we got our first very good day regarding the weather! Finally we got sunshine and a really good day for butterflies so we were quite happy, because the last 9 days were a bit difficult for us and for the butterflies as well. :-)
 But today we got our good chance and we used it well, not wasting time with travelling at all. We thanked the possibility to Chac, the Rain God that finally he turned off the tap for the whole day! :-)

We had a late breakfast and by the time we finished with it it was just getting perfect for butterflies, so we were all very excited to go and see what we can find. We spent about 3.5 hours in the nearby area, just steps away from the restaurant and the rooms.



Common Banner

This was also the first time, that thanks to this nice weather not just that we find nice and new butterfly species, but we also could find them in quite good number! :-)
 Ok, the first butterfly was just a **Banded Peacock**, but soon it was followed by a nice new species **Rusty-tipped Page** and then another one **Silver Emperor**. Wow! What a start!! :-)
 Beside **Four-spotted Sailor** which we had seen before and was common here as well, we found also another 2 new species of sailors, **Blue-eyed** and **Small-eyed Sailors**.

The gorgeous **Malachite** was also regularly around to make us happier with its beauty! :-)
 The next one was a new skipper with a special name, **Turk's-cap White-Skipper**. We found and photographed as well 2 new species, **Crinkled** and **Orange Banner**.

Julia, **Zebra** and **Tiger Heliconian** were in good numbers, this latter one was actually new as well. We also had several **Giant Whites**, a few **Mimosa Yellows** and **Barred Yellows** as well. **Orange-spotted Skipper** was new and also **Texas-powdered Skipper**, **Veined White-Skipper** and **Confluent Skipper**.



Texas Powdered-Skipper



Confused Groundsreak female

Around 1.00 we finished a very successful morning, refreshed ourselves and went to the semi-open restaurant and had lunch between 1.30 and 2.30. Lunch included quesadillas, chilaquiles, tacos, a nice typical Mexican lunch. At the restaurant we enjoyed a view of an amazing **Blomfield's Beauty** and a **Crimson Patch**.



Rusty-tipped Page



Cassius Blue

After lunch we ventured a bit further down to some open meadows and woods with the river. Out of the **Hairstreaks** we found **Fine-Lined Stripe-Streak**. And out of the blue we found **Cassius Blue**. :-)

One of us found on a tree trunk a new cracker a finely marked **Red Cracker**. We saw **Pale-banded Crescent**, but also **Chestnut Crescent** was also new and we had several **Common Blue Morpho** as well, which are always lovely to see.

Many-banded Daggerwing offered a good photo opportunity, so did **Veined Mylon** as well. **Potrillo Skipper** and **Guatemalan Patch** were identified as a new species for the list and another beauty was **Thick-tipped Clearwing**. A nice finding was, but unfortunately just seen by a couple of people **Sun and Moon Metalmark**.



Red Cracker



Common Mestra



Crinkled Banner



Sun-and-Moon Metalmark female

A lovely colored black and orange butterfly was also found with an interesting name referring to German mythology, called **Elf**. We found 2 new **Swallow-tail species** out of which we could identify just **Transandean Cattleheart**, but the other one was also a **Parides species**.

Today's most interesting **new bird species** was **White-throated Magpie Jay**. But we also saw: **Roadside Hawk, American Kestrel, Plain Chachalaca, Red-billed Pigeon, Inka Dove, White-Collared Swift, Rufus-tailed Hummingbird**. A very good and beautiful species was a **Russet-crowned Motmot**.

Of course we saw and heard regularly **Brown Jays, Woodthrush, Clay-colored Thrush**. We found a new warbler species as well, which was **Townsend's Warbler**. But also **Wilson's Warbler** was around. We also had our first **House Sparrow** during the tour!!:-)



Pale-banded Cerscent



mating couple of Ceraunus Blue

We also saw some of the big **green iguanas** since they were fed near one of the buildings. After a nice day we had a dinner in the restaurant and went to sleep early.

Overnight: **Cabanas el Chiflon, Tzimol/Comitan**



White-collared Swifts flew across strong waterfall to spend the night at a safe place

Days 11 November 11th

Those who were interested they went back to the beginning of the trail to the cascade, but the whole group met at 8.30 for the breakfast.

By the time we finisher breakfast weather was again perfect for another butterfly quest.

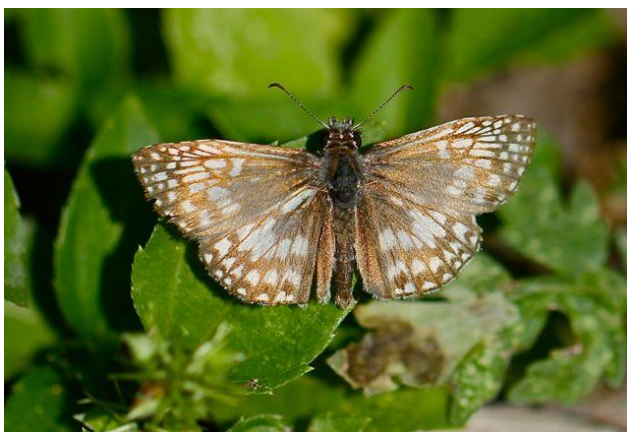
One of the first species was **Blue-studded Skipper** followed by **Tropical Checkered Skipper** and a beautiful **Blackened Bluewing**.

However it was new, it was easy to identify **Red Rim** butterfly. Further new species were here **Tiger-mimic Queen, Thick-tipped Greta, Klug's Clearwing, Confused Groundstreak, Cobalt Longtail, Dorantes Longtail, Double-striped Longtail.**

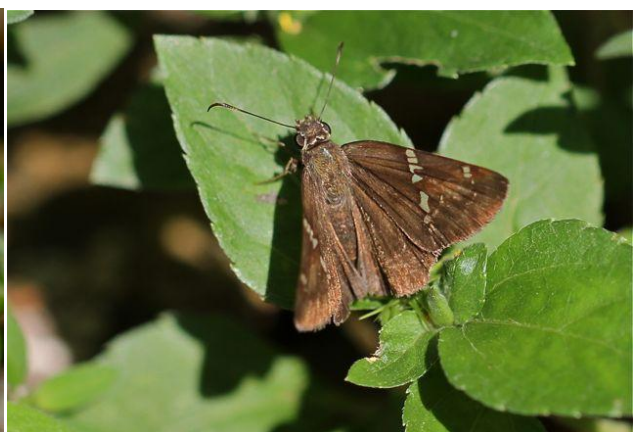
Yellow-tipped Flasher, Yellow-rimmed Ground Skipper, Carousing Jewelmark, Pavon and Silver Emperors, Ruddy Duggerwing, White-patched Skipper, Confusing Sister, Dusky-Blue Groundstreak, Common Blue-Skipper, Lagubrious Blue-Skipper.

We found 2 new **Satyr species White-spotted & Plain Satyrs**. We also had **Mexican Spurwing, Common Mestra, Small Beauty, Mexican Sandy-Skipper, Blurred Bentwing**. We spent a lot of time with watching and trying to photograph **Angled Leafwing**.

So, we had another pleasant morning around El Chiflon.



Tropical Checkered Skipper



Potrillo Skipper



Blue-studded Skipper



Blomfield's Beauty

After finding all these species we were quite happy. We finished the quest of butterflies for the morning just before the hottest hours at about noon, had an early lunch and left El Chiffon after 1.00

On the way, we passed through Comitán around 2.00 and through a busy road we traveled close to another 2 hours till our lovely Hacienda-style mediaeval building hotel in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

After our arrival there was a bit of time to discover the beautiful garden, which had some flowery bushes and also some hummingbird feeders.

One of the butterfly species we added here was **West Coast Lady**.

We had a lovely dinner in the hotel's restaurant with charming fireplace to warm us up, because there in the mountains was really cold.

Overnight: **Hotel Hacienda Don Juan, San Christobal**



Blackened Bluewing



Four-spotted Sailor

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Cobalt Longtail



Brown Longtail

Day 12 November 12th

After breakfast, which we had at 7.00, we left a bit after 8.00 and continued our return journey towards Palenque again, this time driving up on the Ocosingo Road. On the way, we stopped alongside the road, where we could enjoy the view of a beautiful waterfall called Corallido on the other side of the forest and small valley.

The scenery o the road was very impressive with pine-oak forests. We also broke the journey at Ocosingo town, which gave us a chance to fill up the tank and visit restrooms. And this was an interesting stop, because we also saw an **Immature Zone-tailed Hawk** and a **Yellow-throated Euphonia** as well.



Angled Leafwing



Falcate Metalmark

We arrived to the parking area of **Tonina** around 11.30. First we looked around in the parking lot and we found: **Common Mestra, Rusty-tipped Page.**

New species included **Bronze-covered and Hooded Orioles**, but we also saw a beautiful **Blue-Diademed Motmot** and **Black-throated-Green, Black-and-White Warblers and American Redstart.**



Picnic at Tonina



Tonina from a distance

At noon we had our picnic here, which we preorder at our previous hotel. Later on we walked in to the **Tonina archeological site** and spent a few hours partly discovering the ruins, but also concentrating on new butterfly species.

Andrea told a lot of stories about Mayas what she researched and learnt during more than a decade. So while the obligatory local guide said one or two sentences Andrea not just simply translated, but multiplied the info continuously.

The first new species was a **Giant Swallowtail** followed by the previously already seen **Eastern-tailed Blue**. Another beautiful new species here was **Farcate Metalmark**, it's relative, **Common Lexmark** was really common. :-)

As usual we had **Zebra and Julia Heliconians** and **Crimson Patch** as well. Several Crescent species were found here including the before seen **Chestnut, Pale-banded Crescent**, but **White-dotted** and **Orange-patched Crescents** were new.

But their relative, **Black-bordered Tegosa** was present as well.



Ideas of Che Guevara & Emiliano Zapata still alive at the foot of the Tonina Ruins



Giant Swallowtail



Turquoise-spotted Navy 88

We had **Banded Peacock** and **Malachite**, which were quite common, but also **Confusing Sister** and **Small-eyed Sailor**. **Red Rim** and **Orange Banner** added some more colors. On one of the trees we found **Glaucous Cracker** as well. **Blomfield's Beauty** and **Many-banded Daggerwing** were already familiar from the previous days. Satyrs were represented by **Plain** and **Carolina Satyrs**. We found again **Thick-tipped Greta**. Beside the previously seen skippers such as **Veined-white**, **Glassy-winged Skipper** and **White-striped Longtail**, we also added to the last new ones like **Tanna Longtail** and **Rounded Bolla**.

We walked back to the parking lot, where it turned out, that Steve lost his camera inside the ruins. We organized some help for him and half an hour later he was happily riding back on a motorbike with one of the local people and the re-found camera! :-). Perhaps the pictures had even bigger value for him, than the camera itself. In the meantime the group enjoyed again a fantastic view of a stunning butterfly, the **Turquoise-spotted Navy 88**.

Finally we left after 3.30, we passed the famous **Agua Azul Waterfalls** at about 5.30 and another hour later we arrived to **Misol-Ha**, another beautiful waterfall, where we had our accommodation.

However we had some confusion with the rooms, because of not competent people being at the reception for the "night", but finally everybody got a room! Unfortunately the hotel was not really prepared for our arrival, however it was pre-ordered a long time before, had long correspondence. After that we quickly ordered dinner, some tequilas to make up the bed start at this place, which is otherwise a stunning location. It is a perfect place not just to cool down in a jaw-dropping environment, but also to find some additional butterflies and birds.

Overnight: **Palenque, Misol-Ha Cabanas**



Malachite



Black-veined Mylon

Day 13

November 13th

This morning Gabor offered a pre-breakfast birding, which we started at 6.00. The first interesting species was a **Chestnut-headed Oropendola**. After that Gabor started to imitate a **Ferruginous Pigmy Owl**, which worked very well, the bird landed in front of us in a tree. Soon all the small songbirds came and alarmed. We had excellent views **Green and Red-legged Honeycreepers, Yellow-throated Euphonia** and **Melodious Blackbird**.

Various colourful Tanagers came as well, including: **Golden-hooded, Yellow-winged** and **Summer Tanagers**. On a nearby tree we saw an **Altamira Oriole** and **Golden Fronted Woodpecker**. We had another 2 surprising species here **Ringed Kingfisher** and **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, which -the latter one -Gabor and Andrea had never seen here before. There was actually a 3rd and final surprise here as well in the form of a **Green Ibis**. Although it was still early for butterflies we managed to find a new species, which was a **Scalloped Owlet**. Plus of course we had a couple of **Banded Peacocks** as well.

We had breakfast at 8.00 and started at 9.00, but to our surprise our leaving was harder, then arriving, because early morning the road's surface was totally broken by workers and it was almost impossible to go on it, we had to wait quite a while.

We broke the journey in Palenque and 1,5hours later we arrived to the airport of Villahermosa.

Monarch Extension



It is important to mention, that we were there just at the beginning of the monarch season. They just started to arrive and generally most of the reserves are not even open! So we had to pre-organize to let us get in those reserves.

Monarchs like the **Oyamel Fir trees** and when they are there for the wintering they gather and cover the branches , so they look like specially ornamented Christmas trees!

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However everybody was aware that this is not the best timing for the monarch, because of November is generally the time when they start to arrive back to the wintering grounds everybody decided to make the **Monarch extension**.

So after finishing the tour in Yucatan and Chiapas we needed to catch our flight from Villahermosa to Mexico City. We had our picnic lunch and some refreshment, coffee at the airport and then checked in for our flight. Our flight started at 2.00 and although it was a short one, 1.15min., since Mexico City is in a different time zone we landed actually at 4.20pm.

Upon arrival we were waited by Eric and a cheerful driver-guide with a minibus and we travelled to **Tlalpujahua**. On the way we broke the journey for a coffee and some refreshment, sweets. Going through Mexico City was not so easy so we arrived to our hotel quite late. We got our rooms and then right after we gathered for the dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Los Arcos in Tlalpujahua



Andrea points out a bird on the trail



Panoramic view on the way

Day 14 November 14th

This morning we felt freezing cold and when we checked it turned out that it was actually 14Celsius! After being in the warm however quite rainy Yucatan this change was quite big. But here we are in the mountains, so this different climate was not so surprising!

Before breakfast a few members of the group had seen a couple of birds from the terrace including **Magnificent Hummingbird**, **Cassin's Kingbird**, **Mexican Chickadee**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and **House Finch**.

We had breakfast at 8.30 and we started at 9.30, but we soon stopped for filling up the tank.

We traveled through Santa Rita and within an hour we arrived to **El Chincua Monarch Reserve**. At the parking lot we looked around a bit and seen some **House Sparrows**, **Ladder-backed Woodpecker** and the first of the many **Yellow-eyed Juncos**. A beautiful **Western Bluebird** and a **Hermit Warbler** were new species! We also saw **Yellow-rumped Warbler** and an **American Robin**.

Just after 11.00 we started our hike, but Jenny, Steve and Lucy opted to ride on a horseback. At the very beginning we saw the first **Monarchs** in the air. Surprisingly we witnessed that an **American Kestrel** tried to catch one. About 40 minutes later we were at the end of the horse trail. Here we saw a beautiful endemic **Red Warbler** and a **White-eared Hummingbird**.

With a bit more walk we reached an area where there was a bigger number of Monarchs roosting. This offered quite a good possibility to observe and photographing them. We also had an **American Painted Lady** in the area.

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Later on we returned back and arrived to a simple restaurant area a bit after 2.00. Here we had an excellent locally roasted pork meal with cactus leaves and onion. For those who wanted to avoid pork delicious quesadillas were an alternative option. Those who could not rest were looking for more birds and butterflies even during meal time.

They managed to find **Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird** and a new butterfly **Dainty Sulphur**.

We arrived back to our hotel at a round 4.00, refreshed ourselves and then we went for a short city tour. It was interesting to see, that the little town was in full excitement to prepare for Christmas. This is a center of making Christmas tree ornaments and there was surely a huge selection of them in all different shapes, colours and sizes for people to buy. So, we ventured in a bit to the market and it was really interesting to see how and what people were buying. Even some of us bought some nice ornaments! We also visited the beautiful Cathedral and stopped at a coffee shop as well.

Eric showed us the old part of the mining town which was destroyed by a huge landslide during the 1930s. It was heartbreaking to see the ruins of the church and all the other century old remains of the town. This was where an unidentified **nightjar** was calling, heard by part of the group and briefly seen by Andrea. We walked back to our hotel on the old cobbled roads, had our lovely dinner and prepared for the next day.

Overnight: Hotel Los Arcos in Tlalpujahua



Townsend's Warbler immature female



Yellow-eyed Junco

Day 15 November 15th

This morning before breakfast around the Los Arcos hotel group members found **Slate-throated Whitestart, Acorn Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Redstart, Yellow-rumped,** immature female **Townsend's** and **Tennessee Warblers, American Kestrel.** But the best finding was a **Grey Silky-flycatcher.**

We had our breakfast at 8.00, packed in the van but had a little confusion for a while, because 1 of the van keys were not found. :- (But no panicking, this was just part of Mexican lifestyle and after about 15 minutes later the key was found and we could start our journey to the most famous Monarch Sanctuary, **El Rosario.** :-)

Traditionally this is the place where the largest colonies can be found, so it can be more popular with other visitors as well. During our walk here we gained about 300 meters elevation, so it is a climb, but there are stairs and handrail to help. But we also could take our time, there was no rush!



One up close Monarch, a real beauty



Looking for roosting groups of Monarchs

We saw plenty of Monarchs high in the air, but we could just walk to a smaller roost, the leaders of the reserve did not let us go further to a larger roost.

They were afraid that our visit would disturb the formation of a larger roost. Gabor and Andrea negotiated really hard and our local guide was eager as well, but we had to respect the rules.

We reached a big meadow at 3.100m height and searched butterflies, birds, wildflowers, and other wildlife at the bushes. We have found a beautiful **Mexican Silverspot** and a **Common Greeneyed-White**.



Mexican Silverspot

As for birds we saw again the endemic **Red Warbler**, **Slate-throated Whitestart**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **American Robin** and **Yellow-eyed Junco**.

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Red Warbler



Ruby-crowned Kinglet

With some patience we managed to spot **Chestnut-capped and Green-striped Brushfinch** as well, out of which the latter one is a local endemic species.

Another 2 interesting species were **Lincoln's Sparrow** and the **endemic Striped Sparrow**. We had again **Magnificent Hummingbird** and also **Yellow-throated Warbler** and **Brown Creeper** was new.

We walked down and at a simple place we had a quite late lunch with tacos con chorizo. :-)
For the ones not fancy meat we could order again quesadillas which were really delicious as well!! :-)

Later on we travelled back with a short stop at Ocampo, where in Calle John Lennon we stopped shortly at an Oxxo shop. We ended up at Rancho Margaritas at Valle de Bravo in the evening which is nearby to Laguna de Avandaro. This sits in a mountain area with breathtaking scenery. The whole region is covered with trees. It is a pleasant place to stay for 2 nights close to a picturesque, typical Mexican town with its fine buildings and cobbled streets.

Overnight: **Laguna de Avandaro, Rancho las Margaritas in Valle de Bravo**



Green-striped Brushfinch, endemic



Striped Sparrow, endemic

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Face to face with an endemic Red Warbler



Slate-throated Whitestart

Day 16 **November 16th**

This morning before breakfast some of us looked around in the garden where beside the previously seen common birds, such as **House Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Acorn Woodpecker** and **Housefinch** we also found some interesting new ones, such as **Canyon Towhee, Curve-billed Thrasher, Swainson's Thrush, Inca Dove, Bewick's Wren, Vermillion Flycatcher** and **Baltimore Oriole**.

We had breakfast at 7.30 and an hour later we started to drive to the last **Monarch Reserve at El Chapulin** where we arrived within an hour.

We got the information, that on the top of the hill local guides found large roosting site of Monarchs. They convinced us that the only way to visit this area is going on horseback which would be about 1,5hours. They could not provide enough horses for the whole group, so Gabor started to come with us by walking till the forest and there he could show couple of birds such as **Yellow-eyed Junco, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Slate-throated Whitestart, Housefinch** and an endemic **Red Warbler**.

He also saw a female **Virginia's Warbler** and **Tufted Flycatcher** but that one unfortunately he could not show to the group. Then the trail became really steep, it was hard even for the horses so Gabor started to stay behind. While he was down he was looking for birds and butterflies and he hoped, that he can show some of them to the group when they'll be back.



Tufted Flycatcher



Brown Creeper

Unfortunately the ride up to the hill was much longer, it took us about 2.5hours, but the worst news was that we could not find any large roosting sites of monarchs which was very

disappointing. There were some in the air and also some coming down, but nothing too exciting. :- (We felt that local people cheated us and it was not a good feeling, because we trusted them and wasted a lot of time, money and energy on this futile adventure. It was too much time on horseback, most of us felt really exhausted by the time we arrived back to the bottom of the hill. But at least after that we had an excellent but very belated picnic lunch, prepared by Eric.



Virginia's Warbler female



Slate-throated Whitestart

We had quesadillas, tuna salad with chipotle - our favourite Mexican chile sauce-, some vegetables, coffee, refreshment and even beer!

At the huge meadow and alongside the road we managed to find some new butterfly species such as **Golden-banded Dartwhite**, a beautiful **Mexican Silverspot**, **White-spotted Satyr**, **Yellow-rimmed Groundskipper**, **Freeman's Poan**.

A day-flying moth, a **Footman** which belongs to the **Zyganidae** family was quite common on the flowers of the meadow. A huge tall **Centauria Agave** was in flowers and heavily visited by **Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Wilson's Warbler**, **Hooded Oriole**, **Magnificent** and **White-eared Hummingbirds**.



Golden-banded Dartwhite



White-spotted Satyr

We had seen again dashing colored **Vermillion Flycatcher** and a bit further on, alongside the road Gabor found and showed to the group a **Hooded and Evening Grosbeaks**.

Around at 4.30 we left the area and travels back to the hotel, where we arrived within an hour. A few of us from the group decided to do a short sightseeing in the lovely town of Valle de Bravo with the van, but most of the group opted for staying, packing and get ready for next day's long trip

After our farewell dinner we discussed, that next morning we leave at 5.30.

Overnight: **Laguna de Avandaro, Rancho las Margaritas in Valle de Bravo**



White-eared Hummingbird



Moth; Zyganidae

Day 17 November 17th

We had an early wake up call at 5am and at 5.30 we started our drive to Toluca airport to reach our return flight to Cancun, from where the group had to wait for their connection with overnight flight to Birmingham.



Cinnamon-bellied Flowerpiercer



On the trail

Day 18 November 18th

Arrive back to the UK

