

# Butterflies & Birds of Honduras

## Trip Report

April 7 – 14, 2018 | Written by Robert Gallardo

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Participants: Lenore, Harold, Dorothy, Rick and Robert.

This year marked Naturalist Journeys' inaugural butterfly and bird tour to Honduras with four spirited adventurers from Canada. The slow paced tour included visiting only two areas: the Lake Yojoa region and the north coast centered around a large river abutting Pico Bonito N.P. This gave us a chance to visit lowland, mid-elevation and cloud forest habitats to see a wide array of butterflies and birds.

After we were all together we made our way to the Cerro Azul Meambar N.P. (PANACAM) along the eastern side of the Lake. We would spend the first four nights at the Los Pinos visitor's center amidst a mid-elevation forest.



On the first morning we

walked a nearby trail that led to a waterfall, but not before finding out the location of the magnificent Black-crested Coquette. It was using a dead hanging branch as a perch in between jaunts to nearby blooming Inga trees. At one point another male appeared and there was some brief sparring. We also surprised a male Collared Trogon that was on the ground for some reason.

En route to the waterfall we began to encounter various species of ithomiids which include the true glasswings and all the non-glasswing kin. This multifaceted group all utilizes nightshades (Solanaceae) as larval foodplants which render the adults distasteful. To add to the splendor, as the trip went on we would also encounter a myriad of mimetic species that imitate the glasswings.

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At the waterfall itself we found an Ochre-bellied Flycatcher that was extremely busy gathering moss to add to its bulky hanging nest. As the sun reached the riverbed a few butterflies appeared including the stunning Orange-banded Daggerwing (*Marpesia corita*) and the finely marked Aztec Bentwing (*Cycloglypha thrasibulus*).



During lunch Lenore showed us a picture of a butterfly she photographed along the trail and it was identified as a Dot-collared Firetip (*Jemedia pseudognetus*) which ended up being the first country record of the trip.

After lunch we walked a short trail near the visitor's center and encountered many more butterflies including the bizarre Clearwinged Mimic-White (*Dismorphia theucharila*). This is the only species of transparent sulphur whose canny resemblance to the true glasswings renders it some form of protection and is often found together with them. This would be the only one we encountered on the entire trip.



The following day after breakfast we descended down the hill a bit to where a small creek crossed the road. Since this was the dry season a lot of the wildlife would be looking for any available moisture. Indeed, we found numerous birds and butterflies that were concentrated around the creek and the small lagoon at the bottom of a spillway. A pair of Altamira Orioles was busy attending their nest that overhung the water and Boat-billed Flycatchers were feeding on the fruits of a nearby Gumbo Limbo Tree. A nearby flowering aster attracted a small assortment of butterflies including sulphurs and patches. It wasn't long before a couple of "star" butterflies made their appearance below the bridge. They were two species of Crackers which belong to a unique group who have the ability to make an audible clicking sound with their wings which is often heard in territorial displays and less often while performing a mating ritual.



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Back at the lodge it had quieted down due to the mid-summer heat, but we managed to get great views of the gleaming Violet Sabrewing and the Chestnut-headed Oropendola as it made its bubbly-gurgling sounds high up the subcanopy.

However, the biggest celebrity of the day was Honduras' only species of clear-winged satyr; commonly known as the Rusted Clearwing-Satyr (*Cithaerias pireta*). However, Robert likes to refer to it as the 'Rosy-blushed Satyr'. Although it is fairly



common in Honduras in its appropriate habitat it is nonetheless a very difficult butterfly to photograph without using a flash.



On the following morning we departed early and made our way to Santa Barbara N.P. on the western side of the Lake. There, we would visit an community-based ecotourism project at 5,000ft. The Urquhart's went ahead with a local guide to hike a longer trail while Robert stayed back with the Atwood's and another local guide.

As we were all readying to depart a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl appeared in a Cecropia tree. Along the walk we spotted something starting to rise above a near ridgeline and it ended up being a White-breasted Hawk, a regional endemic. Our guide, Pablo, found a nest hole in a large pine tree and it belonged to an Emerald Toucanet, allowing for scope views. Atop a nearby tree we got scope views of a White-naped Brushfinch which was a treat as this species usually stays hidden deep within the thick brush. We also got brief looks at a Stripe-tailed Hummingbird and a small flock of Bushy-crested Jays. On our way back to the van we heard the tell-tale sounds of the Blue-crowned Chlorophonia high above our heads. There were, in fact, some large clusters of fruiting mistletoe, a favorite food supply of this lovely highland bird. A couple of Elegant Euphonia made a brief appearance before flying off. After much searching and patience we finally found the female chlorophonia that was perched and got scope views.

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Since it was cool and cloudy the butterfly activity was fairly slow, but as it started to warm up in the late morning we did encounter some. One was the Patilla Clearwing (*Ithomia patilla*) as it nectared on blooming *Ageratum* and the other the Chained Hairstreak (*Contrafacia bassania*) which turned out to be another country record.

On the morning before departing for the north coast we decided to climb the canopy tower before breakfast. It had rained the previous afternoon so unlike the other mornings it was cooler and the bird activity was booming. There was almost constant activity and a couple times there were bursts as flocks came and went. We saw Collared Trogon, Golden-crowned Warbler, 4 Squirrel Cuckoos at the same time, Keel-billed Toucans, Lesser Greenlets, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Red-eyed Vireos, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Chestnut-headed Oropendolas and Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers.



After breakfast we departed for the north coast, but were sure to stop in Tela to have a scrumptious seafood lunch at a beachside restaurant. Their shrimp spaghetti and homemade hot sauce are a sure hit. We eventually reached the Omega jungle lodge along the Cangrejal River along the eastern side of Pico Bonito N.P.

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Before breakfast we did some bird watching near the rooms and found a lone Red-legged Honeycreeper male, Gray Hawk, Ovenbird and the classy Chestnut-colored Woodpecker.

On the first morning we walked up the lodge's main trail to explore the lowland rainforest. The bird activity was hopping and we found the Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee and heard the Bright-rumped Attila as it called from high in the canopy. We ran into small groups of migrants including the Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, American Redstart and Northern Parula.

We observed a large variety of Longwings including the Julia, Zebra, Tiger, Crimson-patched, Heart-spotted, Blue-and-white and Grinning. The Common Blue Morpho zipped constantly in and out of the vegetation. All in all it was an excellent day with a nice mixture of both birds and butterflies.

On the last full day we visited two different trails within Pico Bonito N.P. One was located across a long suspension bridge and we saw a small variety of birds including a female White-necked Jacobin, female Scarlet Tanager, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and Long-billed Gnatwren. We then moved upriver a little ways to walk an easier trail. There we saw a Stripe-throated Hermit, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Sepia-capped Flycatcher, female Golden-winged Warbler and got great looks at a Tawny-winged Woodcreeper that was foraging at an army ant swarm.

As we approached an overlook into a nearby river, we crossed through some riparian forest and found a nice surprise: a Brilliant Bluevent (Anastrus nearis), one of the most stunning of the interior rainforest skippers. On the way back to the van it was if someone opened a can of hairstreaks as we started to run into a variety of forest hairstreaks. We took photos of most and one ended up being another country record: the Flying-W Hairstreak (*Strephonota ericeta*).



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We returned to the hotel and took the afternoon off.

Favorite birds and butterflies:

Lenore: Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Blue-and-white Heliconian, Small Beauty.

Harold: Chestnut-colored Woodpecker, Flying-W Hairstreak, Dot-collared Firetip

Dorothy: Violet Sabrewing, Green Kingfisher, Common Blue Morpho

Rick: Altamira Oriole, Collared Aracari, Starry Cracker

Robert: Blue-crowned Chlorophonia, Brilliant Bluevent, Rusted Clearwing-Satyr

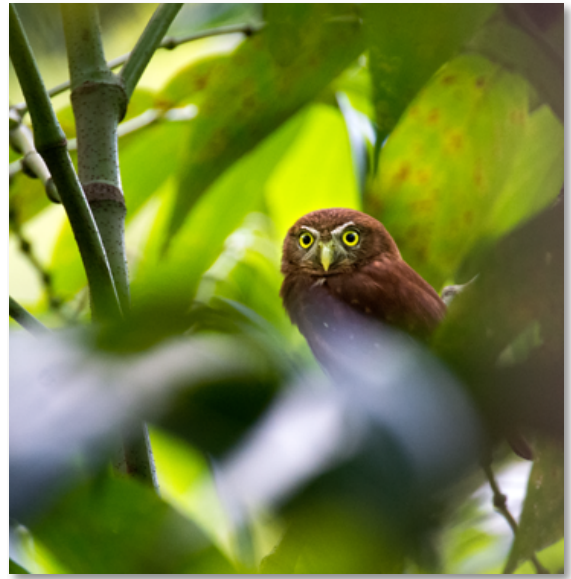


Photo credits: Lake Yojoa marsh, Robert Gallardo (ROGA); Black-crested Coquette, Sandy Sorkin (SASO); Orange-banded Daggerwing, ROGA; Altamira Oriole, Terry Peterson (TEPE); Red Cracker, ROGA; Violet Sabrewing, SASO; Rusted Clearwing-Satyr, ROGA; Collared Trogon, ROGA; Squirrel Cuckoo, SASO; Red-legged Honeycreeper, Greg Smith; Magnolia Warbler, Dan Donaldson; Julia Longwing butterfly, Mukesh Ramdass; Brilliant Bluevent, ROGA; Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Mike Boyce.

