

A TOUR TO THE MONARCH OVERWINTERING SANTUARIES IN MEXICO

March 12 – 19, 2005

This trip to see the monarch butterflies in their roosting grounds of Mexico will be a little different than ordinary trips. We will try hard to show you to an aspect of Mexico not seen in regular tourist excursions – Mexicans living in a rural area trying to grapple with problems of making a living off the land while trying to conserve the monarch butterfly. You will see real people living close to the butterflies some of whom are not accustomed to tourists. Emphasis will be on exploring the natural history of the region, but the trip also will include many cultural and culinary delights. Teacher groups will have an opportunity to visit a Mexican school. There will more walking than usual for this is the best way to see the place including the monarch butterflies¹. We hope you can participate in our adventure.

ITINERARY

Day 1: Fly into Mexico City staying at the Hotel de Cortes. Take taxis to the hotel from the airport. See below for foolproof instructions on how to reach the Hotel de Cortes. We will assemble at 5:30 PM for an orientation chat and a get-acquainted supper at the Cafe Tacuba. On the way to the restaurant we will walk through the Alameda, a place of immense historical importance to Mexico, and pass by the white-marbled Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts).

Day 2: To avoid Mexico City traffic, we will departure early (7:30 AM) for Toluca where we will have breakfast. After breakfast, we will drive to the colonial town of Valle de Bravo through forested mountainous country around the 15,000' Nevado de Toluca. On the way we will pass by Herrada, the mountain massif on which one of the butterfly colonies is located. Weather and butterflies cooperating, we may see them streaming down the mountainside to find water. For the naturalist in the group, there will be birding opportunities. Some of the birds include the golden-browed and red warblers, clay-colored robins, slate-throated redstarts and if we are very lucky, a gray-barred wren or mountain trogon. A picnic lunch will be served in one of the high alpine meadows in view of the Nevado. Here there should be an opportunity to observe striped sparrows, bluebirds, kingbirds and Scott's oriole. That afternoon we will drive to our Hotel Los Acros. Many artisan shops grace the cobbled streets of Valle. Shops feature pottery, leather goods, weaving and the usual array of Mexican crafts. In the evening the town seems to concentrate itself into a joyful assemblage at the zocalo (principal plaza) in a manner only found in Mexico. We will stroll through the town and dine at the Restaurant Michoacana.

Day 3. After a continental breakfast at our hotel, we will leave Valle and drive to the largest butterfly colony in the Sierra Campanario near the Ejido, Rosario¹. On the way we will pass through Mazahua Indian country where many of the women dress much as they did before the conquest. We will lunch at one of the local "tiendas" that features quesadillas, tacos made in hand patted blue Indian corn. After lunch we will climb into the forest where the monarch colony is located and view them at our leisure. Late afternoon we will descend into the old mining town of Angangueo where we will stay at the Hotel Don Bruno. After supper we will see a slide show on the monarchs by our guide, Bill Calvert. The migration biology and natural history, research and conservation efforts to protect the overwintering colonies are among the topics that will be discussed.

Day 4: We will return to a second, pristine butterfly colony located in the Sierra Chincua² to view monarch behavior at a different time of the day. In the morning we will visit a school in the

Anganguero area for an example of how the Mexican educational system works³. Lunch will again be at one of the “tiendas” back at the entrance to the Chincua reserve. Late afternoon we will journey to our Hotel Agua Blanca⁴ during which we will descend from boreal forest to tropical dry deciduous forest. You will experience the contrast between the high altitude boreal forest where the monarchs live and the dry deciduous tropical forest the upper slopes of the Rio Balsas. The grounds of Agua Blanca are immaculately kept; many tropical exotics are present. If we are lucky we will see a white morpho butterfly meandering along the river and possibly the white-napped swifts - the world's largest swift - flying the canyon. Bring your swimming suits. There will be opportunity to swim in the two thermal (tepid) pools.

Day 5: After a leisurely morning touring the grounds of Agua Blanca, we will visit at the pyramid, San Felipe de los Alsati, built by the Matlazincas, a group of Indians who had the misfortune of being sandwiched between two major Indian kingdoms. Along the way we are almost sure to see a magnificent vermilion flycatcher and its mate. In the afternoon we will have an opportunity to swim, explore the natural history of and enjoy the exquisite grounds of our hotel. Two waterfalls are within easy walking distance.

Day 6: After breakfast, we will travel south to Malinalco where the Aztec maintained a redoubt and ceremonial center. Here carved out of the mountain above the town is the temple where new members of the Order of the Jaguar and Eagles were initiated. These were the Aztec "special forces" charged with guarding the king and his palace. They also were expected to distinguish themselves in the "flowery battles" with the chosen enemy. Below in the center of town is a 16th century Augustine monastery that graces the town plaza. Painted on walls, once beneath 22 coats of plaster are the Paradise Garden murals. These murals, painted by Indian artisans, represented an attempt by the Spanish crown and mendicant religious orders to pacify and Christianize the vanquished Indians.

Day 7 Return to Mexico City. We will reach our Hotel de Cortes. in late afternoon, time enough to tour the nearby Franz Meyer Museum. Also nearby is the famous "skeleton" mural of Diego Rivera and the Palacio de Bellas Artes, also full of murals. Mexican crafts and arts may be purchased in the Zona Rosa, a short taxi ride from the hotel. In the evening we will meet at a preselected place for a farewell diner.

Day 8 Fly home. (Those wishing to shop more are encouraged to fly home late Saturday or on the following day so that they can visit the exquisite Saturday Market (Bazar Sabado) in San Angel. This market is open every Saturday morning from 9:30ish to around noon.) Also the museums are free on Sunday and the Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of the Templo Mayor are world class. Neither the Saturday Market nor these museums are an official part of the tour.

¹ At the butterfly colonies Chincua and Pelon, horses are generally available to ride part of the way to the butterfly colony.

² There are three butterfly colonies in the Anganguero area. We have time to visit only two of them and cannot always predict which ones will be the best with respect to biological interest and accessibility. Therefore we may change the itinerary slightly to visit the best colonies in a particular year!

³ We will substitute a natural history or cultural activity in place of visiting a school for groups composed mainly of naturalists.

⁴ Sometimes we use the alternate and equally delightful Rancho San Cayetano near Zitácuaro as a base of operations.

FEATURES AND COSTS OF THE TRIP

The cost for the tour will be \$1095.00 person for seven days and seven nights double occupancy (\$1495 single occupancy) plus airfare, which, of course, varies greatly depending on where you are from and the timing of your ticket purchase. The fee includes all meals, lodging and ground transportation except taxis service from and to the hotel in Mexico City (estimated at \$11-12 each way), alcoholic beverages and tips for personal services (porters and maids) and bus driver. A \$300.00 deposit secures a place. This deposit is refundable if you give us sufficient time to fill your spot.

We will endeavor to make the trip of special interest to naturalists and artists by visiting great birding habitats and areas where crafts may be viewed and purchased (See Saturday Market option above). A slide show will be presented featuring all aspects of monarch biology, some aspects of scientific research and the conservation biology of the species. The interactions of local people with monarchs and the impact of monarchs on the local economy will be discussed. The trip will include visits to two pyramids not generally known to the public. Finally there will be an opportunity to view many bird species that are endemic to central Mexico.

Most of our accommodations and restaurants are four star. All of them portray the special flavor of the Mexican culture. Some of the restaurants we will visit are among the best in Mexico.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE TOUR LEADER

Bill Calvert

Bill Calvert received a BA from the University of Texas in philosophy and then went off to serve in Uncle Sam's Army. After two year's soldiering, he decided to do something practical. So he took up the study of butterflies. For his dissertation project he researched butterfly feet. More specifically, he investigated the mechanism by which female butterflies located their host plants. It turns out that they use their front legs to taste a potential host as final verification of its suitability. After graduating, he studied bark beetles in Mississippi and later, tent caterpillars in Massachusetts. While at the University of Massachusetts, he met Lincoln Brower, one of the world experts on the monarch who was then at Amherst College. They started a collaboration that has produced over thirty scientific papers on the monarch and which continues today.

Most recently he has become the Texas coordinator of the Monarch Watch, a non-profit enterprise, the purpose of which is to learn as much about the biology of the monarch butterfly as possible using volunteers to extend the range of observation throughout the whole of Texas, and to use the monarch butterfly to teach basic concepts of ecology, and reproductive and migration biology. Along the way, the Texas Monarch Watch hopes to instill in those who come in contact with this beautiful creature an appreciation of science, and especially of nature. In addition to this, each migratory season he tries hard to observe the migration in Texas and Mexico to accumulate information about how they get themselves from latitude 45 to latitude 20 and find those nine small areas in the highlands of Mexico.

Personal: BA Philosophy: University of Texas.
PhD Zoology: University of Texas

INFORMATION ABOUT MONARCH BUTTERFLY TOURS

Accommodations: All five hotels in which we will stay are excellent with clean, comfortable rooms. The Hotel Agua Blanca was chosen because of its spectacular setting and immense biological and geological interest.

Arrival: You must first clear customs. This process is usually perfunctory and takes only a few minutes. You will probably have to push a button on a stoplight. If green you pass right through. If red they will inspect you. They may x-ray your luggage in addition to the button-pressing procedure.

Taxis from the airport: Take a taxi to the Hotel De Cortes. Taxi tickets are sold at booths in the airport that are government controlled. Buy a taxi ticket in advance from one of these government ticket agents. They will charge you a fixed price based on the zone in which the hotel is located. The location nearest the International exit is around to the left as you pass out of the customs area (sliding doors). Signs to the ticket booths say SERVICIO TAXIS.

Our hotel in Mexico City is the Hotel de Cortes on Calle (street) Hidalgo across from the Alameda. It is in the historic zone - zone number four. I paid about \$12.00 in March of 2004, but rates generally go up each year. This fee is good for up to four people but luggage space may limit you to three. If more than four, you must buy another ticket or consider renting an eight passenger van. It is NOT recommended to hail taxis off the street in Mexico City. If you are intercepted by people in the airport offering taxis service, politely refuse them and buy a ticket from the government sponsored taxis service, SERVICIO TAXI. After buying the ticket, you must reenter the main corridor, turn left and walk through some glass doors about 100 yards ahead on the right hand side. There will be many taxis with the airport logo and a number of people to direct you to a waiting taxi.

Climate and clothing: Daytime temperatures in Mexico City should be in the mid-60's to mid-80's and could be as low as the 40's or 50's at night. The Monarch colonies are near 10,000 feet elevation, but we will be at that elevation only during the day. It will be cool in mornings and evenings and during cloudy weather. Afternoon temperatures during sunny weather may rise into the 80's. Expect temperatures from 40 - 90F. We will ride in an open truck up to the colonies, which may produce some wind-chill. Please bring warm clothing such as a warm, medium weight coat or better, a light coat and sweater - garments that you can peel off or add on as the temperature changes are best. Also bring one set of light clothing such as shorts and tee shirts and a swimsuit. Almost any footwear suitable for walking will do from tennis shoes to boots. The trails are rocky, so ankle support is probably a good idea. Although rain is unlikely (February/March is the middle of the dry season), please bring sufficient rain gear to be able to continue activities in a light rain. If we arrive in the colony area after a long dry spell, road dust thrown up by other vehicles could be a problem. In this event a handkerchief or dust mask is very useful. Remember the tropical sun (ca. 20N latitude) is intense. Bring a brimmed hat and sunscreen. Mexican hotels are not heated. Some (Don Bruno in Angangueo) get cold at night. Bring one set of warm bedclothes just in case.

Currency: The Mexican peso is somewhere around 10.50 to the dollar. The best rates have been at bank outlets called Casa de Cambios scattered throughout Mexico City or at the airport, but every now and then hotels try to accumulate dollars and give better rates. Unfortunately these times are not predictable. Since we will be spending most of our time outside of Mexico City where changing money is difficult, we recommend that you take a few minutes at the airport to change the money that you think you will need in Mexico. Bank teller's "booths" line the wall

opposite your exit point from Customs into the airport. The exchange rates among these booths usually vary only a few hundreds of a peso, but why not get the best rate?

Since virtually everything is included in the price of the tour, you will need only money for snacks, alcoholic beverages, a few tips, and things you may want to buy. In many cases, especially in the urban centers, credit cards are accepted.

Tips: Most tips are covered. All restaurants and guides are covered. Baggage handlers who load and unload the bus are covered. Only when someone performs a personal service for you (takes your bags to your room) should you tip. At the end we will take a tip collection for the bus driver.

Documents: US citizens need only proof of citizenship to enter Mexico. A birth certificate or passport will do. A voter's registration card used to work, but is now questionable. If you don't have a passport, take an official birth certificate. You will be issued a tourist card upon entry into Mexico. You will need to present your copy of the tourist card when leaving Mexico. Losing it will result in lots of grief!

Health precautions: Please read this section carefully. Remember that the Monarch colonies are at 10,000 feet elevation. The air is thin. Depending on where the colony forms and the time of the year, the hike to the colony can be strenuous for people not used to the altitude. (The colonies tend to form high and move down as the season progresses). We will visit two colonies - Rosario and Chincua. In the case of Rosario we start low and walk up. So visiting in late February or March will be an advantage. In the case of Chincua we start high and walk down. Their having moved downslope will be a disadvantage, since we will have to walk further down and then back up. We ask that you exercise good judgment in deciding whether or not to make the hike to the Chincua colony. If you have any doubts about your health at these altitudes, we strongly suggest that you consult your physician. Both in order to experience the ambience and because there is often no alternative, **we will be walking a lot. You should be able to walk several miles comfortably to take full advantage of these magnificent phenomena.**

No vaccinations are required to enter Mexico. The Centers for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm>) recommends an immunization against yellow fever (good for 10 years) and a gamma globulin shot for the prevention of hepatitis. We will not be in any hot, steamy tropical areas. Contact the CDC for the latest information on potential health hazards in Mexico, especially if you will be visiting areas other than the Monarch sanctuaries.

Because of the tropical latitude, thin atmosphere and lack of water vapor and dust in the air, solar radiation is very intense. Bring sunscreen and a brimmed hat for mid-day use.

To avoid traveler's diarrhea follow these common-sense rules: Never drink unpurified water or ice, unpasteurized milk or milk products, or eat uncooked vegetables or unpeeled fruit. Also avoid undercooked fish, shellfish, beef and pork, as well as old mayonnaise or creamed mixtures. Purified water (filtered or electropurified) is available at our hotels. Purified water is now generally available in Mexico. We will have a 5 gallon container with pump on the bus for your use. If traveler's diarrhea does occur, Kaopectate or Imodium can help relieve symptoms. Drinking and eating cautiously is usually sufficient to avoid the problem. Please consult your doctor for recommendations for medications against traveler's diarrhea.

Luggage and carry-on: Please limit your baggage to one medium or small suitcase and one carry on. We suggest that you place all essential medications, critical items and equipment and a change of field clothes in your carry-on luggage.

Personal items: Be sure to bring a canteen or water bottle for daily use. You will need a day pack for carrying personal items while visiting the butterfly colonies. Other suggested items are an alarm clock, small flashlight, sunglasses, chapstick, binoculars, and ear plugs. (Even rural towns in Mexico can be noisy). Many people have missed wash cloths. Rural Mexican hotels do not supply them.

Photography: For best results photographing the Monarchs, a 50mm lens and a long lens with plenty of flash is recommended. The Mexican guides at the butterfly colonies are inconsistent about the use of flash at the colonies. Some prohibit its use. They believe that flash harms the butterflies, although there is no evidence to support this claim. There should be opportunities for good butterfly cluster shots without flash. In general there will be some, albeit limited, opportunity to use flash. Please contact me directly if you wish to take lots of flash pictures.

Time: The part of Mexico that we will visit is on Central Standard Time.

Birding: Some birds you may expect to see: Gray barred wren, slate-throated redstart, red warbler, tufted flycatcher, gray silky-flycatcher, black-backed oriole, black-headed grosbeak, western bluebird, Townsend's warbler, acorn woodpecker, curve-billed thrasher, Steller's jay, Scott's oriole, ruby-crowned kinglet, white-eared hummingbird, amethyst-throated hummingbird and maybe a mountain trogon and a striped woodcreeper. A checklist will be available.

MONARCH WATCH OF TEXAS

JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF MEXICO & THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY
WINTERING GROUNDS

2005

A journey to the heart of Mexico featuring the monarch butterfly overwintering grounds, visits to a rural Mexican school (teacher groups only), towns and settlements, pre-Columbian pyramids and many aspects of Mexican culture.

NAME(S) (print full name as it appears on passport for each traveler)

1. _____ Birthdate _____
2. _____ Birthdate _____
3. _____ Birthdate _____
4. _____ Birthdate _____
5. _____ Birthdate _____

Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____
Fax _____ e-mail _____
Phone number(s) prior to departure _____

Name of emergency contact _____
Relationship _____ Phone number of contact _____

Special dietary requirements _____

ACCOMMODATIONS

Roommate request(s) _____

MONARCH TRIP BALANCE

Your final payment must be made by check made out to "Monarch Watch of Texas, Inc." and must be mailed to and received no later than January 15, 2005.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance is not provided by us, but is most convenient. Most policies provide redress for trip cancellation, various delays and inconveniences, travel accidents, associated emergency medical/dental problems and, if needed, emergency transportation. There are many agencies. Your personal travel agent may be a good source. One agency recommended previously used by members of "Monarch Watch" expeditions is Access America at 1-800-284-8300.

_____ I do not wish to buy insurance.

_____ I already have travel insurance.

_____ I plan to purchase travel insurance on my own.

LIMITATIONS OF LIABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Monarch Watch of Texas, Inc. contracts with service providers in Mexico who provide means of transportation, lodging and meals and/or other related travel services. The Monarch Watch of Texas, Inc. assumes no responsibility howsoever caused for injury, loss or damage to persons or property in connection with any service resulting directly from: acts of God, detention, annoyance, delays, expenses arising from quarantine, strikes, thefts, failure of any means of conveyance to arrive or depart as scheduled, civil disturbances, terrorism, government or regulations, and discrepancies or changes in transit or hotel services over which it has no control. Reasonable changes in the itinerary may be made where deemed advisable for the comfort and well being of the participants. By final payment to the Monarch Watch of Texas, Inc., the client agrees to be bound by the above terms and conditions.

I have read and accept the responsibility clause as stated above. I authorize the Monarch Watch of Texas, Inc. to make reservations for me in accordance with the information above.

Date _____ Signature _____