

Monarchs in Mexico 2008
Coordinated by *Monarchs Across Georgia* since 2004

This trip to see the Monarch butterflies in their roosting grounds of Mexico will be a little different than ordinary trips. We want to show you an aspect of Mexico that is not seen on regular tourist excursions – Mexicans living in a rural area trying to grapple with problems of making a living off the land while trying to preserve the Monarch butterfly. You will see real people living close to the butterflies, some of whom are not accustomed to tourists. The emphasis will be on exploring the natural history of the region, but the trip also will include many cultural and culinary delights. We will also have an opportunity to visit at least one Mexican school. There will be more walking than usual, for this is the best way to see these places including the Monarch butterflies. We hope you can join us on our adventure!

Monarchs Across Georgia is offering two separate weeklong trips in 2008. The dates are

- o February 16 - 23 and
- o February 23 – March 1, 2008.

Each week we will offer the same itinerary (with the exception of the lodging on the 5th and 6th night).

BASIC ITINERARY

Day 1 (Saturday)

Your tour coordinators, Susan and Trecia, will meet you in the airport of **Morelia, Mexico** (MLM) when your flight arrives around 8:00 p.m. You will meet our wonderful, safe bus driver, translator, and handyman, Hugo Huber Torres, board the bus and travel to our accommodations at the Hotel Casino in the central historic district of Morelia. After checking into your rooms, we will enjoy a late night supper together. We recommend the unique flavors of the special house salad accented with caramelized hibiscus flowers and/ or the creamy soup topped with squash blossoms. The menu is varied, with every dish both delicious and beautifully presented.

Day 2 (Sunday)

After a fabulous breakfast of fresh fruit consisting of papaya, mango, pineapple, and cantaloupe, along with specialty omelets made from the local cactuses and the best café con leche anywhere in Mexico, we will make our way toward our next destination, the “Avocado Capital of the World,” Uruapan.

Along the way, we will stop and tour the archeological ruins at **Tingambato** dating back to ~500 to 1000 A.D. Here, platforms surrounding a central plaza with multi-chambered pyramids and a ball court distinguish these ruins from others in western Mexico.

Next we will travel to **Patzcuaro**, a cultural and artisan center for the state of Michoacan, Mexico. Its original name was "Tzacapu-ansucutinpatzcuaro" translated as "door to heaven." Here the beautiful central plaza where we will have lunch remains a tribute to its namesake, Vasco de Quiroga. Opportunities to purchase unique pottery, masks, textiles and “Day of the Dead” items abound. We will wander the narrow cobbled streets among lovely old buildings with arches and commanding facades and enter the **Basilica de Nuestra Señora de la Salud**, which houses the Virgin of Health, dating from 1547 and created from a mix of crushed cornstalks and wild orchid extract.

Our next stop will be **Santa Clara del Cobre**, a small town near Patzcuaro specializing in copper. Santa Clara was an important copper-producing region long before the arrival of the Spanish Conquerors, although no ore is now extracted from the local mines. The arcades of the quaint town plaza are lined with copper shops, the square itself is hung with copper planters and the central bandstand or kiosk is roofed with the same metal. Of particular interest is the town's Museo del Cobre (Copper Museum) where we will begin with a short tour, before wandering the shops.

Our travels for the day will be complete when we arrive at our accommodations in **Uruapan**.

Day 3 (Monday)

After breakfast, we will board the bus to travel to **Paricutin**, the volcano born in a Mexican cornfield just six decades ago. You will have the choice of either riding horses or walking the trail to the lava field that destroyed the town of San Juan Parangaricutiro, enveloping the church and leaving only the steeple protruding. We will spend time exploring this unique area before returning to Uruapan for a picnic lunch in the **Eduardo Ruiz National Park**. In contrast to the open sunbathed lava fields that we visited in the morning, this park offers 19 hectares of shaded walkways surrounded by the soothing flow of the singing waters of the Cupatitzio River

where we might catch a glimpse of some of the exquisite species of butterflies that call this region of Mexico their home.

A short drive will bring us to our sleeping quarters for the evening at the **Hacienda La Cruz**. Our host, Jose Luis Alvarez Alcala, bought this 400-year old hacienda in 1983. Jose Luis is a man of vision. He realized what was happening to the forests of the Monarch's overwintering areas and those adjacent to the Lakes Patzcuaro and Zirahuén. In 1996 he created the La Cruz Habitat Protection Project (LCHPP) and within a year, the first 8.5 acres of land adjacent to the El Rosario Monarch overwintering area was re-planted with trees. The LCHPP can now boast of the 2.5 million seedlings that have been planted! We will tour his amazing tree nursery operation on the property and learn about his efforts to reforest the area, protect the Monarch sanctuaries and provide a viable income source for the local people. <http://www.lchpp.org/index.html>

Day 4 (Tuesday)

We will need an early start to travel several hours eastward to "butterfly country" and the old mining town of **Angangueo**. An open-bed truck driven by German Medina, the Journey North mailman, will take us on the last leg of our trek through the town and farther up the mountainside to the base of the **El Rosario Monarch Butterfly Reserve**. We will lunch at one of the local "tiendas" that features quesadillas, the tortillas made with hand-patted blue corn. After lunch we will walk the steps and trail into the forest for our first glimpse of the Monarch colony and view them at our leisure. <http://www.texasento.net/monarcher.htm>. Before leaving the reserve, you will have the opportunity to visit the "tiendas" that line the entranceway and select a purchase from a wide variety of Monarch butterfly T-shirts and paraphernalia. We will then descend into town where we will enjoy dinner at our hotel together with Angangueo resident and our dear friend, Estela Romero Vazquez. Estela is fluent in English and a wealth of information about everyday life, politics and influences in this area of Michoacán.

Day 5 (Wednesday)

In the morning, we will travel to the village of **Macheros**, one of the "ejidos" that is responsible for the care-taking of the Monarch butterfly reserve on the Pelón massif. Here we will visit their school, bringing them books and much needed supplies, lunch on locally-raised trout at Rosa's café and then mount our steeds to ride up the mountainside to view the butterfly colony of **El Capulin**. This colony is more remote than the first and the forest is ancient and well-protected. This day is usually a very different experience than visiting the El Rosario colony, and offers a wonderful look at the complexities that the Mexican people face as they struggle to live alongside the butterflies.

Late in the afternoon we will journey to the **Hotel Agua Blanca in Jungapeo**, descending approximately 7000 feet into the canyon. You will experience the amazing contrast between the high altitude boreal forest where the Monarchs live, and the dry deciduous tropical forest on the upper slopes of the Rio Balsas. The resort grounds of Agua Blanca are immaculately kept and many tropical exotics are present. If we are lucky we will see White-naped Swifts, the world's largest swift, flying the canyon or perhaps a cluster of the Zebra Heliconian butterflies forming in the shrubs near the river as they "bed down" for the night.

Day 6 (Thursday)

This is a day for relaxation if you so choose. We hope that you have packed your swim suit as there will be opportunity to soak in the thermal (tepid) pools and doze in the dappled sunlight. You may choose to indulge yourself with a massage, facial, and/or reflexology session, so be sure to save a few pesos for these options, although credit cards are accepted here! There are waterfalls, "bat caves," and some unique geological formations to explore. Swiss proprietor, Tomas Behn, will be glad to point you in the right direction for any of these delightful hikes on the property.

Your other option for the day is to visit a third butterfly colony at **Sierra Chincua**. Although it remains a beautiful forest, this reserve has been heavily logged and offers quite a different experience from the other colonies that we visited. We will have to retrace our path, traveling northward to arrive at this reserve. At the base of the mountain, horseback will be the recommended mode of transportation to approach the colony where once again you will marvel at the magic and mystery of this incredible insect!

We will spend a second night at Agua Blanca where after dinner, an optional night hike will be available for interested participants to visit a nearby waterfall and see the mysterious glowworms that live in this particular area.

FOR WEEK TWO: Day 5 and 6

The day activities at Macheros, El Capulin and Sierra Chincua are the same each week. Our accommodations (and the opportunities that they offer at their location) are the only difference.

We will stay at the **Hotel Rancho San Cayetano in Zitacuaro**. This property is situated on 12 acres of woodland in a relaxing rural setting. There are numerous opportunities for bird-watching, strolling through the immaculate grounds and relaxing poolside. Perhaps we can convince Pablo Span, the proprietor, to lead us on a walk through town to the church of Saint Francis Coatepec (better known as "San Pancho") where a portion of the Humphrey Bogart film, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*, was made. We are sure that you will savor the delectable meals prepared by his French wife, Lisette, from your breakfast omelets to the beautifully presented full course dinners. The Spans, longtime residents of the area, are deeply involved in Monarch conservation and have hosted events for this purpose with such guests as Mexican President Felipe Calderon, Dr. Lincoln Brower and World Wildlife Fund. We will have the opportunity to view one evening a DVD of Dr. Lincoln Brower's aerial reconnaissance research on the location of Monarch colonies, the results of which were published in the Spring 2007 edition of *American Entomologist*.

Day 7 (Friday)

We will return to **Morelia**, stopping along the way for a relaxing lunch at Pescaderia Linda Vista on Lake Cuitzeo. Here local shrimp and fish are the specialty. Arriving in the early afternoon, we will have time to stroll through the streets of this lovely colonial town enjoying the architecture of its many churches and public buildings. The Cathedral and Casa de las Artesanias (museum and store of local artists) will be included on our tour. Hotel Casino will be our lodging for the night but our farewell dinner will be at La Casa del Portal overlooking the Armas Plaza. Perhaps fireworks in the square will entertain us as we dine on sweet corn tamales drizzled with cream or spicy tequila shrimp. These are just two of the specialties from the varied menu from which we are sure you will find an entrée and/or dessert that will suit the occasion.

Day 8 (Saturday)

You will be transported to the Morelia airport (MLM) via bus in time to make your early morning flight back to the USA. We wish you a safe journey home!

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE TOUR LEADERS

Susan Meyers

My name is Susan Meyers. I have a BS in Microbiology and a MS in Environmental Science. I have long been a proponent of environmental education and have used lessons from Project Learning Tree, Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), Project WILD and Monarchs in the Classroom in my volunteer work with Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, PTA, youth camps and schools.

I am employed part-time by Stone Mountain Memorial Association to teach a variety of environmental education classes to K-12 students in Stone Mountain Park and currently serve as co-chair for the steering committee of *Monarchs Across Georgia* (MAG) with Trecia Neal.

How did my interest in Monarchs begin? It all started back in March of 2002 when I attended a workshop at the annual Environmental Education Alliance (EEA) Conference. There I met Kim Bailey who had just returned from a trip with Dr. Bill Calvert and was oozing with enthusiasm about the trip and Monarchs. I called Bill that weekend and was able to slip into one of his trips in March 2003 with a wonderful group of teachers from New Jersey. I was so impressed with Bill, those teachers (and, of course, the Monarchs) that I made arrangements before I even left Mexico to reserve a week in 2004 for Georgia educators. It has become an annual migration for me!

I continue to learn about and be fascinated by the magic and mysteries of the Monarch and am looking forward to sharing the experience of the overwintering Monarchs with you.

Trecia Neal

My name is Trecia Neal. I have a BS and MS degree in Biology, with an emphasis in Animal Behavior and Science Education. I have been a biologist at Fernbank Science Center in Atlanta, GA since 1990. Before I came to Fernbank, I taught High School biology for 3 years. Fernbank is operated by the DeKalb County School System, one of the largest school systems in the state. We have a planetarium, a small museum, and an undisturbed 68-acre remnant forest with a staff of about 35 scientists that are responsible for teaching all areas of science to PreK-12 students in DeKalb County. We also serve the public and out-of-county students. A large part of our mission is staff development.

Several years ago I became interested in Monarchs while I was attending an Outdoor Classroom Symposium workshop at Zoo Atlanta given by Kim Bailey. If you've never been to one of these, and you are a teacher in Georgia, be sure to ask me about this Symposium, as it is absolutely wonderful for teachers that incorporate environmental education into their lessons.

My areas of expertise are ornithology, and environmental education, and establishing outdoor classrooms and gardens at schools. For the last 3 years I have been teaching students and teachers about the wonders of Monarchs. This will be my fifth year to go to Mexico with Susan. Needless to say, it is the highlight of my year, and I feel that helping to get teachers to Mexico and to incorporate Monarchs into their curriculum is a very important part of what my mission is as a teacher and a scientist. After returning from Mexico the first year, Susan and I became the co-chairs of *Monarchs Across Georgia*, and have been busy working with this group of individuals to spread the word about Monarchs across the state to teachers as well as the public.

I am very excited about returning as a co-leader to Mexico, and learning more about the Monarch's ecology and developing more resources for teachers. I'm looking forward to meeting everyone and networking with all of you!