



## **Mexico: Winter Roosts of the Monarch Butterflies**

**February 29 to March 6, 2020**

**Optional pre-trip extension February 26 to 29, 2020**

**Leaders: Mark Garland & Local Guides**

Many millions of monarch butterflies migrate each autumn from temperate North America to a handful of mountain forest groves in Mexico's Transvolcanic Mountain Range, roughly 100 miles west of Mexico City. It's truly one of the world's greatest migratory spectacles, and astoundingly, most of these millions of butterflies cluster together all winter in areas of just a couple of acres or less. This new ANS travel program features visits to the three sites that typically have the greatest numbers of wintering monarchs. While our primary goal is to marvel at these astounding concentrations and to learn about monarch biology, there will also be time to explore other elements of natural and human history.

The forests where the monarchs winter are high in the mountains, generally over 10,000 feet in elevation, and in most cases the butterflies are located more than a mile uphill from the parking area. Generally you'll have a choice between hiking uphill or hiring a horse (no riding experience necessary) for a very reasonable fee, but the last part of the journey is necessarily on foot. **The trip is therefore considered strenuous, and travelers should plan an exercise regime before the trip begins to be ready for hiking at high elevation. Those with cardiac or respiratory health issues are probably not suited for this trip.**

The optional pre-trip extension is designed for those who would like to experience some of the cultural wonders in and around Mexico City. It's also an opportunity to begin acclimating to the higher altitudes encountered on the trip – Mexico City's elevation is just over 7,000 feet. The extension is led solely by local guides, ANS leader Mark Garland will not be participating.

The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of our plan, and the details may be changed at the leaders' discretion for any reason deemed to be in the best interest of the group.

### **Saturday 02/29/2020 Mexico City (D)**

Depart from the U.S. and arrive in Mexico City. Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel located on the Zócalo in the heart of the historic center of the city. This evening meet in the hotel lobby at 7:00 p.m. for a briefing orientation and welcome dinner. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

**Sunday 03/01/2020 Angangueo (BLD)**

This morning you will depart for the colonial town of Angangueo, located high in the mountains in the state of Michoacán, about 100 miles west of Mexico City. Upon arrival in Angangueo check-in at Hotel Don Bruno and have lunch there. This afternoon take a walking tour through town with resident and monarch guide, Estela Romero. Founded in 1792 the town served as a main mining center providing wealth for the area. Today the town derives its income from butterfly tourism and agriculture. As you explore the cobblestone streets Estela will share sites of interest and the importance of butterfly conservation to the town. Learn also about the devastating flood of 2010, which ravaged Angangueo and other mountain towns. After dinner at the hotel, gather for a briefing to help prepare for the next day. Overnight at Hotel Don Bruno.

**Monday 03/02/2020 Angangueo (BLD)**

This morning we will visit Sierra Chincua, a large monarch sanctuary located in the mountains right above Angangueo. The journey starts with a hike up the mountain\* to about 10,000 feet. Horses will be available to rent for a portion of the trail. The cost is about \$10 (cash only). Some walking will be required but you will be able to walk at your own pace and stop and rest as needed. Once you reach the Monarch colony site you will have the day to enjoy and photograph the spectacular colony. A boxed lunch will be provided to eat while at the site. Please note that there are no restrooms beyond the entry area at the bottom of the mountain. There will be time to visit small shops and cafes located at the entrance area. Birds we could encounter at Sierra Chincua include Striped Sparrow, Olive Warbler, and White-striped Woodcreeper. In the late afternoon return to Hotel Don Bruno where you will have free time to relax and enjoy the hotel gardens, or stroll on your own through Angangueo. Overnight at Hotel Don Bruno.

**Tuesday 03/03/2020 Zitacuaro (BLD)**

After check-out of the hotel, we will visit the Monarch site of El Rosario. This large overwintering colony normally contains well over 100 million adult Monarchs and has an excellent trail system winding through the fir-covered slopes on which the colony is located. Additionally, there is a nearby stream where the butterflies may fly at midday to drink water. At this time of year, they may take flight for an hour or more to water, nectar, etc., before returning to their roost on the tree limbs or trunks. The hike to reach the colony\* may again reach up to 10,000 feet and will require hiking up the mountain, though again horses may be hired. The hike will be at your own pace and birding can be done along the way. Birds we might find here or at the other sanctuaries include Red Warbler, White-eared Hummingbird, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, and Black-vented Oriole. El Rosario also has shops near the entrance with craft items and other souvenirs, along with little eateries. Once at the site the day will be spent enjoying the colony with a boxed lunch to be eaten at your leisure. Restrooms are located at the bottom of the mountain and not in the reserve. In the late afternoon, continue to Hotel Rancho San Cayetano located near Zitácuaro. The hotel is located on 13 acres of beautiful Mexican countryside that are surrounded by gardens and views of surrounding mountains. After dinner, you will gather for a briefing on Cerro Pelón and what to expect in the morning. Overnight at Rancho San Cayetano.

**Wednesday 03/04/2020 Zitacuaro (BLD)**

After breakfast, visit the Cerro Pelón reserve. This visit will be a little more challenging than the previous days with a steeper hike and altitudes starting at about 10,400 feet. Horses will be available for rent for the beginning portion of the hike and may be required due to trail conditions. Depending on the location of the colony, a 30-minute steep uphill hike\* maybe required after the horse ride. Cerro Pelón is the least known monarch reserve that's open to the public, and because of the rougher conditions is it the least visited, so this is likely to provide a more intimate experience. As in the past visits, you will take boxed lunch and there will be no bathrooms beyond the entrance. There's an option to skip the visit to Cerro Pelón enjoy the amenities of Rancho Cayetano and surrounding areas. The property is great for birding, with Vermilion Flycatcher, Black-vented Oriole, Rufous-backed Robin, and a variety of neotropical migrant songbirds often found here. A short walk will take you to Coatepec de Morelo, which is home to the 16th century church, Iglesia de San Pancho, and the lively market in the town of Zitácuaro. There is a swimming pool and a spa at the hotel. Overnight at Rancho San Cayetano.

**Thursday 03/05/2020 Mexico City (BLD)**

We will offer an optional early morning bird walk before checking out of the hotel late in the morning. We'll stop for lunch along the way and arrive back in Mexico City in the mid-afternoon. This afternoon you will have a little time to explore the historic areas of the city before a farewell dinner at the hotel. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

**Friday 03/06/2020 Departure (B)**

Breakfast will be included depending on your departure time. Airport shuttle service transfers out are included and will be coordinated based on flight times. Check-out time at 12:00 pm.

***Optional Pre-trip Extension:***

**Wednesday 02/26/2020 Mexico City**

Depart from the U.S. and arrive in Mexico City. Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel located on the Zócalo in the heart of the historic center of the city. Afternoon and evening at leisure to relax at the hotel or explore the surroundings. Dinners are not included in the pre-trip extension; you can dine at the hotel each night or explore some of the many renowned restaurants within a block or two of the hotel. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

**Thursday 02/27/2020 Chapultepec (BL)**

Today you'll explore the Chapultepec Park, a huge (nearly 1700 acre) green space in the heart of Mexico City. The park features three lakes, a botanical garden, a castle, and several museums, including the Natural History Museum and the National Anthropology Museum. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

**Friday 02/28/19 San Juan Teotihuacán (BL)**

Travel about 25 miles east to San Juan Teotihuacán, a world-famous archaeological site. Two large pyramids are the main attraction; the largest, known as the Pyramid of the Sun, is one of the largest known structures to have been built in the pre-Columbian New World. Our guide will lead you through the site and provide detailed information about the historical and archaeological features of the site. Enjoy lunch and a local craft market before returning to Mexico City. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

**Saturday 02/29/2020 Mexico City (BD)**

This morning features a walking tour of Mexico City's historic district. Visit the Templo Mayor ruins and museum, the ornate Metropolitan Cathedral, and the National Palace, with famous murals painted by Diego Rivera. Relax or explore on your own in the afternoon before gathering with the whole group for a welcome orientation dinner at 7:00 pm. Overnight at Zócalo Central Hotel.

## **Leadership**

**Mark Garland** has been leading ANS nature travel programs since 1984. For almost 30 years he has been involved with various studies of migrating monarch butterflies, and he currently serves as Director of the Cape May Monarch Monitoring Project. He has visited the Mexican monarch reserves twice previously, in 2010 and in 2018.

**Estela Romero** will be our local guide for the visits to the monarch reserves. Estela is the Mexican monarch correspondent for Journey North, an international educational program focused on migrations. Estela is a native of Angangueo and teaches about monarch butterflies in schools throughout the region.

An additional tour guide will be with our group from beginning to end, handling the logistics and any special needs.

\*hike distances vary from year to year depending on the colony location; hikes would not be more than 3 miles round trip.