

Butterfly World (and Birds too)

Coconut Creek, Florida

by Carolyn Swicegood, Hollywood, FL

Butterfly World at 3600 West Sample Road, Coconut Creek, Florida opened its doors in 1988 about 10 miles north of Fort Lauderdale in sunny South

Florida. It was the first exhibit of its kind in the Western Hemisphere and remains the largest butterfly house in the United States. Five thousand butterflies dwell among three acres of

exotic tropical flora. Tourists, local residents, and thousands of children on school field trips, enjoy the kaleidoscope of colors provided by butterflies representative of 80 different species from five continents. Park visitors of all ages are fascinated by the many caterpillars that can be observed in various stages of metamorphosis. Some visitors are lucky enough to witness the release of newly hatched butterflies.

Nature's "winged flowers" are not the only flying creatures of the tropical gardens. Visitors often are surprised to find 150 birds in a park that is dedicated to butterflies. Beautiful hummingbirds, finches, and honeycreepers are right at home in this tropical setting. Lories and Lorikeets were a natural choice for Butterfly World because they thrive on pollen and nectar, the same diet that the butterfly and hummingbird residents enjoy.

Photos by Carolyn Swicegood



These huge enclosures are designed and planted to replicate patches of tropical forest. Of course the birds and butterflies have to be fed. You can see a feeder hanging in the photo on the right.



Many wild birds visit this wonderful lake. One may see herons, Snakebirds, buntings, ducks, hummingbirds, and others stopping by to check out the lake.

Realizing a Dream

Butterfly World was built by partners, Ronald Boender of the United States and Clive P. Farrell of England. Ronald Boender grew up in Illinois with his Dutch-born parents and had a lifelong fascination with butterflies. When he moved to Florida in 1968 after a successful career as an electrical engineer, he decided to pursue his earlier interest. The butterfly farm, aviary, museum, and gardens of Butterfly World located inside the 600-acre Tradewinds Park are the culmination of a long-term dream of Boender. Butterfly World is not only a living butterfly farm that took years of work to perfect, it is a center for research and education. The lush tropical park, butterfly hatchery, aviaries, and all the creatures in residence are diligently tended by Boender and his lovely wife, Grace, as well as an accomplished staff including Bird Curator, Greg Stoppelmoor.

Stoppelmoor and his young family migrated from Iowa to enjoy the tropical climate of South Florida where he has worked with various large collections of exotic birds. He has busied himself for the last few years studying and managing the birds of Butterfly World. His working knowledge of the birds in the park is extensive, and his

awareness of the details of their daily lives is quite amazing.

As we toured the park, Stoppelmoor provided many interesting facts and personal observations about the birds. His awareness of the interactions between various birds, including the pairs of tiny hummingbirds, was amazing. He knew just who was courting whom in the hummingbird community and he knew all the areas likely to be frequented by individual pairs. Besides pointing out current nest sites and new nests recently started, he could accurately predict many of the birds' movements. I got the distinct impression that Butterfly World's Bird Curator was right at home in the rain forest with his feathered charges.

The plant life at Butterfly World is as eclectic as the bird population. Many of the hundreds of flowering plants were planted specifically for the butterflies. Stoppelmoor explained, "The birds are housed in walk-through aviaries in natural settings of trees and flora from around the world. Most of the birds at Butterfly World live off nectar and/or a fruit diet. We feed Nekton products as well as a wide array of fresh fruits. Along with the diet we provide, the birds also have their choice of nectar from the many flowering plants that line

the walkways of the aviaries."

Paradise Adventure and Tropical Aviary

These two aviaries are connected to form 8,000 square feet of screened jungle that rises to a height of 27 feet. The enclosure is home to thousands of butterflies in a natural rain forest setting complete with flowers, trees, waterfall, cave, and cool tropical mist. Six hummingbird species thrive in this natural setting. The four species native to South America are the Sparkling Violet Ear *Colibri coruscans*, Amazilia Emerald *Amazilia amazilia*, Peruvian Sheartail *Thaumastura cora*, and the Violet Euphonia *Euphonia violacea*. The Broad-billed Hummingbird *Cynanthus latirostris* comes from Arizona, while the Japanese White-Eyes *Zosteropes japonica* is from Asia.

Two Hummingbird species, the *Colibri coruscans* and the *Amazilia amazilia*, presented Butterfly World with its first successful fledglings in the early part of 1999. These youngsters fly freely within the enclosure. Stoppelmoor said that they hope for more additions since the *Colibri coruscans* has started construction on her first nest of this breeding season. The South American Hummingbirds' breeding season starts in November and continues through March.

Another inhabitant of this enclosure, the *Euphonia violacea*, is a very prolific breeder and usually nests in the spring and summer. They are great nest builders and weave their oval-shaped nests in the crooks of trees. The nests are made from long dried leave strands and coconut fibers gleaned from the fibrous coconut shells hung in the trees for them. They lay up to five eggs but Stoppelmoor reports that no more than two babies have fledged from a single nest.

The most recent bird introduced into the aviaries of Butterfly World is the Japanese White-eye *Zosteropes japonica*, named for the white ring around its eyes. It is hard to locate this bird within the aviary since it spends most of its time darting from limb to limb high in the trees searching for small insects that live under leaves. This bird provides a beneficial service

to the park by eating aphids and mealy bugs from the flora.

Lakeside Garden Walk

Continuing our tour of the park, we exited the Tropical Rainforest Aviary and entered the Lakeside Garden Walk where local and migrating birds stop in throughout the year. Green Herons, Snakebirds, Ibis, Mallards, White Edged Orioles, Ovenbirds, Buntings, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are but a few of the visitors that stop by the inviting park.

The Lorikeet Encounter Aviary

The Lorikeet Encounter was our next stop. This popular interactive exhibit that was added in early 1998 is occupied by six species of lorries and lorikeets. They fly, play in the trees,

wrestle with each other on the ground, and check out their human visitors. Founder Ronald Boender was captivated by these colorful birds while visiting the San Diego Zoo. He says of the largest avian species in the park, "It's something that people can see and touch. We have signs saying don't touch the butterflies and don't touch the hummingbirds but here people can come in, hold the birds, and feed them. Friendliness is their biggest trait — they love people."

The birds have full flight and free range of the aviary during the day. Their diet consists mainly of Nekton Lory. An attendant is always nearby to keep a well-trained eye on the birds and to give small cups of liquid nectar to visitors who enjoy feeding them. For many of the guests, this up-close and

personal encounter with tropical birds is a new and exciting adventure. When the birds spot a visitor holding a cup of their favorite food, they immediately flock to them. Any number of birds are suddenly eager to light on a hand and drink from the cup while others make good use of arms, shoulders and sometimes heads to await their chance at a sip of the sweet nectar. There are double entrances to prevent escapes but as the attendant explained, even if a bird hitches an undetected ride out of the enclosure on someone's clothing, it won't go far. The birds obviously have no desire to leave their happy home.

The lorries and lorikeets are placed in a sectioned night house late every afternoon, explained Stoppelmoor. "This is done for their safety and for the advantage of feeding them a large variety of fresh fruits and vegetables in a controlled environment. The aviary and night house are kept meticulously clean because of the birds' liquid diet. We feel that we cannot do too much cleaning in this exhibit."

Jewels of the Sky Aviary

To get to the hummingbird aviary, we crossed a lake full of beautiful lily pads on a naturally shaky, suspension bridge made of wooden planks and rope. This quaint replica of a real bridge admired by the owners in an Ecuadorian rain forest leads to the Jewels of the Sky Aviary which was named for the sparkling kaleidoscope of colors sported by its feathered residents. This is where the largest number of the park's birds are housed.

The species of birds in this aviary are comprised of North American hummingbirds, Anna's *Calypte anna*, Broad-billed *Cyananthus latirostris*, Broad-tailed *Selasphorus platycercus*, Costa's *Calypte costae*, and Rufous *Selasphorus rufus* as well as South American hummingbirds, Amazilia Emerald *Amazilia amazilia* and Oasis *Rhodopsis vesper*.

The Tanagers present are Paradise Tanager *Tangara chilensis*, Violaceous Euphonia *Euphonia violacea*, Red-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes cyaneus*, and Yellow-legged Honeycreeper *Cyanerpes caeruleus*.

The Finch species are the

Photos by Carolyn Swicegood



Green-naped Lorikeets enjoying each other's company.



Butterflies, hummingbirds, and lories are attracted to plants which are especially selected for them. Birds also enjoy the running water in the small fountain.

Madagascar Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*, the Crimson Finch *Rhodospingus cruentus*, and a wide variety of the colorful Gouldian Finches.

Some of the birds have bred quite readily in this aviary. Much to everyone's surprise, the fodies were such eager nesters that they started weaving nests only a couple of weeks after being introduced into the aviary. The male is the master nest builder of this species and he uses a variety of materials. He breaks off small branches from trees and uses coconut fibers to attach them to limbs to form a frame for the nest. Leaves and other small bits of material are used as a covering over the outside frame. Cotton and other soft materials are provided for the fodies to line the interior of their nest. The male does not participate in rearing the young, but he keeps intruders away from the nest and protects the babies once they fledge.

Butterfly World had some measure of success breeding the honeycreepers early on, but have had no successful fledgings for the past year and a half. The problem is believed to be heavy rainfall. The honeycreepers usually go to nest during the rainy season and their feeble nest sometimes falls apart. Stoppelmoor said that they are experi-

menting with various nest types and hoping that the birds will accept some of them. The Gouldian Finches will use any of the finch nest boxes or wicker nests that are provided. As aviculturists might predict, they are prolific breeders in this environment. Their vivid flashes of color enhance the tropical feel of the aviary as the Gouldians fly about and perch in the trees.

A few of the hummingbirds in this aviary have built nests, laid eggs and hatched chicks, but there have been no successful fledgings. Stoppelmoor speculates that because there is no shortage of suitable food, the females might have been too young to complete the feeding process. Along with

nectar, the hummingbirds are supplied an unlimited number of fruit flies and small spiders. Hopes are high that they will breed successfully next season now that they are a little more mature.

Wonders of Jamaica Aviary

There is justifiable excitement at Butterfly World about a new project under construction. The Wonders of Jamaica Aviary will house bird species endemic only to Jamaica. This will be the only place in the world where the birds of this lush island country can be seen in captivity. The birds are Western Streamertail Hummingbird *Trochilus polytmus*, Jamaican Mango Hummingbird *Anthracothorax mango*, and Orangequits *Euneoris campestris*. Other native Jamaican species may be added later next year. The Jamaican birds at Butterfly World are on loan from the island's government through their office of Natural Resources Conservation Authority.

Conclusion

Aviculturists visiting or traveling through South Florida would no doubt enjoy a visit to the tropical paradise of birds, butterflies, fish, and flora known as Butterfly World. Late mornings and early afternoons are the most active times for the butterflies but the birds are always ready to say "Hello" to the quarter-million annual visitors.

For the benefit of readers with internet access, Butterfly World has a web site at:

<<http://www.butterflyworld.com>>



Photographs provided by Ronald Boender, Founder and Carolyn Swicegood, *Watchbird*

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