

Florida's Land of Tiny Treasures Butterfly World

"The story of Butterfly World is the story of a dream realized, and how one man's dream, when pursued, can affect his community, and even the world, in a wonderful way."

—Butterfly World Official Guide



by Glenn Ostle

Since opening its doors in 1988, Butterfly World has become one of the premier attractions of South Florida and has introduced thousands of visitors to the wonders of lepidoptera—or the world of butterflies and moths.

Located on a ten-acre site just north of Ft. Lauderdale, it is the largest butterfly park in the world and features impressive aviaries, botanical gardens, research facilities, a butterfly farm, and a museum. A stroll through the grounds is immediately rewarded with the sight of butterflies flying, courting, feeding, and basking in the sunlight.

But Butterfly World is, above all, the embodiment of one man's dream.

In 1968, Ronald Boender began raising butterflies and their food plants at his Florida home. He later established a small company to provide farmed butterflies to universities and zoos. But it was not until he met Clive Farrell, originator of England's famed "butterfly house" concept, that he set out to build a butterfly center in the United States.



Above: A walking path within the lush Tropical Rain Forest aviary. Left: *Heliconius* on a Mexican sunflower. Right: *Siproeta stelenes* butterfly on yellow bloom.



Butterfly World aviaries were designed to suit Florida's temperate climate and subtropical setting and to allow butterflies to be "outside" on live exhibition year-round. At the front of the facility is the large Thomas C. Emmel Butterfly Research Center, where more than one million butterflies have been bred. Visitors can witness the entire life cycle and marvel at unusual caterpillars and pupae. On a wall hangs the butterfly emerging area, where, if your timing is right, you will see new butterflies wriggling free.

The highlight of the center is the lush Tropical Rain Forest aviary, an 8,000-square-foot, open-air paradise that is the largest single butterfly habitat in the world. Thirty feet high and enclosing 240,000 cubic feet of space, it contains

more than five thousand butterflies that at any one time represent at least fifty species from five continents. Over the course of a year, more than 150 different species will have been on display.

Fluttering free, they light on tropical plants, feast on nectar blossoms, and bask in the sun accompanied by the sound of cascading waterfalls and classical music.

As plants are essential for the propagation and survival of butterflies, the center's horticultural department grows thousands of specialized plants to feed the caterpillars and provide nectar for the adult butterflies.

As you leave the Tropical Rain Forest you pass extensive outdoor gardens, beginning with the Grace Gardens and continuing on to the English Rose

Garden. Hundreds of native Florida butterflies live and fly freely outside in these gardens and feed on the native nectar and caterpillar food sources that have been planted just for them.

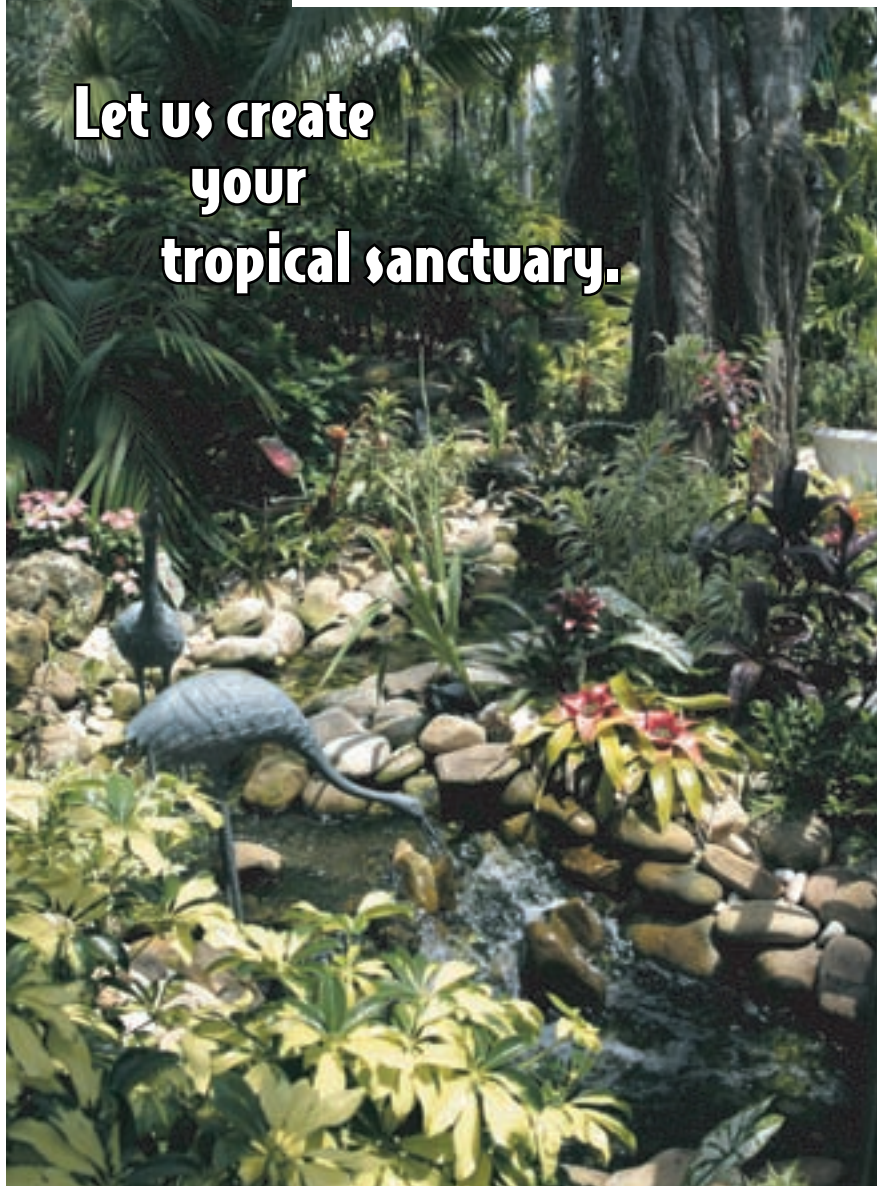
Nearby, within a maze-like, vine-covered canopy called the Secret Garden, is the world's largest collection of *Passiflora*, the large and highly improbable-looking flowers that early Spanish and Portuguese missionaries thought represented different aspects of the passion of Christ, hence its more common name passionflower.

According to legend, the stigma represents the three nails used to nail Christ to the cross, the center column of the flower represents the cross itself, and the small violet-colored filaments that surround its base represent the crown of thorns. The five petals and five sepals are thought to represent the ten disciples present at the crucifixion, while Christ's resurrection on the third day is represented by the three underleaves.

In addition to its incredible appearance, *Passiflora* is also an important food source for butterflies. One species, *Passiflora boenderi*, was first cultivated by Ronald Boender and eventually named for him to honor his efforts in founding the Passiflora Society, which has been bringing together passionflower enthusiasts at Butterfly World for the last fifteen years.

In 1998 the Lorikeet Encounter was added, where visitors can interact with the "clowns of the bird world." Lories and lorikeets, also known as "brush-tongued" parrots for their long tongues that allow them to feed on pollen and nectar, are happy to eat right out of your hand.

Cross the lake by way of the Tinalandia Suspension Bridge, a replica of one found in the real rain forest of Ecuador, and you will find the Jewels of the Sky hummingbird aviary. Opened in 1996, this is the country's largest free-flight hummingbird aviary and home to eight different species of the hardworking little bird, the largest live collection in the world. A number of other colorful



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EXPLORER



Above: The Tropical Rain Forest aviary is the largest single butterfly habitat in the world. Top right: A butterfly finds refuge amid the flowers of a white *Pentas lanceolata*. Bottom right: A Clipper butterfly on Red Java Glory Bower.



species also buzz by so close to your head that you could almost reach out and touch them.

Your tour ends with a visit to the Museum/Insectarium that contains a spectacular collection of unusual insects, butterflies, and moths from around the world. Super-size creepy-crawlies can be viewed up close in natural settings at the Bug Zoo, allowing the whole family to learn about and appreciate nature's diverse insect kingdom.

Butterfly World has also taken an active role in worldwide butterfly conservation efforts. To address the problem of dwindling butterfly populations in North America due to habitat destruction,

Butterfly World has initiated a Bring Back the Butterflies campaign to help people restore large numbers of butterflies back to the landscape. This effort calls for people across the continental United States and Canada to build a small garden in an effort to reverse the ongoing destruction of butterfly habitat in their local area. Butterfly World also hosts regular weekly butterfly gardening seminars. And you can even purchase pupae in the gift shop as you leave.

Ron Boender has continued to support off-site research and has created the Boender Endangered Species Laboratory at the University of Florida. Working in conjunction with the scien-

tists there, Butterfly World has been instrumental in saving the endangered Schaus swallowtail, a species of butterfly that is becoming reestablished in Florida.

As butterflies are "solar-powered" and can fly only if their body temperature is above 86 degrees, they are best viewed in the morning and until about 3 p.m., so make sure you arrive early. This is one visit that will definitely make you feel like spreading your wings. 🦋

Glenn Ostle is a freelance writer, photographer, and avid traveler whose work has appeared in publications such as Caribbean Travel & Life, Sport Diver, and Scuba Diving.

If You Go

Butterfly World is located at 3600 West Sample Road (in the Tradewinds Park), Coconut Creek.

The center may be contacted at 954-977-4400 or gardens@butterflyworld.com, and is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. To get there, take I-95 to Sample Road, head west and enter Tradewinds Park on the south side of Sample Road, a quarter mile west of the Florida Turnpike. Admission is \$18.95 for adults and senior citizens and \$13.95 for children, ages three to eleven. Children under three are free. Group rates and annual passes are available.

Before you go, be sure to visit Butterfly World's impressive Web site (www.butterflyworld.com) where you can take a virtual tour of the entire facility and check out the very thorough bird and butterfly guidebooks. You can even virtually rotate a Blue Morpho butterfly to view it from all angles!

PHOTOS BY GLENN OSTLE

Butterfly Facts

While some species can live up to ten months or longer, most butterflies live only about seven days. Within the aviary, however, this time is extended to as long as fourteen days.

Butterflies differ from moths in several ways:

Butterflies generally rest with their wings folded above their bodies, perpendicular to the ground. Moths usually rest with their wings folded alongside their bodies.

Most butterflies have antennae that are clubbed at the end, whereas the antennae of moths are pointed or feathered.

The words “pupa” and “chrysalis” have the same meaning. A cocoon is the silk casing a silk moth caterpillar spins before it turns into a pupa or chrysalis.

Most butterflies are tropical, so they don’t have to cope with winter weather. Those that do, hibernate at different stages of their life cycle.

Butterfly courtship rituals are widely varied and may include such behaviors as dancing, the spraying of pheromones, and spiral flight patterns. Mating may take just a few minutes or last as long as forty-eight hours.

Female butterflies have “smell” sensors on their feet and antennae to determine which plants on which to lay their eggs.

The color patterns of butterfly wings are made up of thousands of tiny overlapping scales. Colors are produced through chemical pigment within each scale or by reflections of light off the surface of the scale that produces a flashing, iridescent effect.

Monarch butterflies migrate the longest distance—over two thousand miles from Canada to Central Mexico.

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