

The Papiliorama at Marin : a fascinating world

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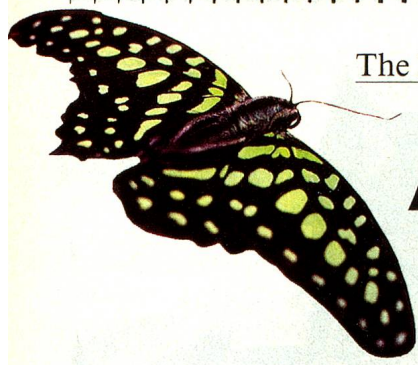
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The Papiliorama at Marin

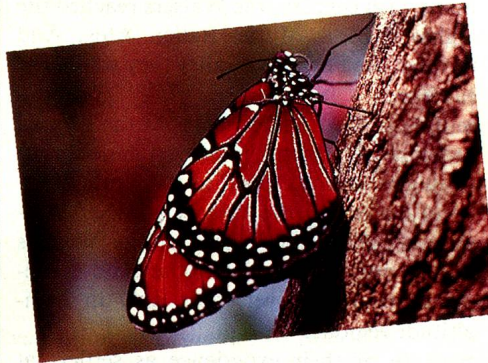
A Fascinating World

The visitor to the "Papiliorama" may at first feel almost dizzy in the multi-coloured world of fluttering butterflies. The beautifully patterned insects come flying from every direction, brushing your cheek lightly with their wings, whirring above your hair and buzzing around your nose. Dazzled by the shimmering colours you may well rub your eyes to make sure that you are not in some fairy-tale world but in the amazing Papiliorama at Marin, near Neuchâtel.

This wonderful spectacle can be reached very easily by car or train (the railway station is just a few minutes' walk away). Close by the ample car-park, the visitor enters a glass-roofed dome planted with lush tropical vegetation. Inside this dome more than a thousand butterflies of some forty different species are flying around, collecting nectar, mating and laying their eggs on leaves (on which caterpillars are already munching ravenously, in preparation for the pupation that will one day transform them into beautiful butterflies!). And soon afterwards the cycle will begin all over again, under the gaze of the visiting spectators.

Under the dome, it is pleasantly warm, rivulets meander lazily round exotic plants, sunbeams play on the water, giant water-lilies from the Amazon region of Brazil undulate gently on the waves set in motion by the predatory fish, while banana trees bend

under the weight of their fruit. Water-tortoises swim idly under the watchful eyes of dwarf caymans. Some blood-curdling creatures swim in the aquarium for carnivorous fish or crawl around in the insectarium which houses some tarantulas. Against this back-ground, butterflies and songbirds bring flashes of colour as they fly around



inspecting their domain. Chinese quail act as scavengers, keeping the ground neat and tidy, and gobbling all the worms and spiders that they can find. And the abandoned spiders' webs prove invaluable to the rainbow-hued humming birds who use them as material for building their nests!

Lepidoptera have a clever inborn method for defence against their natural enemies, based on camouflage. But they are at a loss to defend themselves against interference and en-



croachment on their habitat by human beings as exemplified by deforestation, soil erosion, insecticides and ever denser urbanisation – all leading to the annihilation of many species. The operators of the Papiliorama aim at bringing these endangered species closer to mankind, and at contributing towards their better protection.



The Swiss Association for Wildlife Conservation has recognised the seriousness of the situation and has published a 500-page book with 1,300 illustrations, about butterflies and the role they play in Nature, and the conservation measures that are so urgently needed to prevent their extinction. These lovely insects undoubtedly deserve our attention and our aid.

Edy Aubry, from «Der Brückenbauer»; photos: Erling Mandelmann.

