

# The Butterfly Park of the National Zoological Garden, Dehiwala, Sri Lanka

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The Butterfly Park of Dehiwala Zoo was started on 27th October 1981. At that time the size of the Park was 80 ft in length, 38 ft in width and 10 ft in height. It was completely covered with wire mesh to prevent butterflies from flying out and to provide ventilation. A glass sheet of 3'x10' was fixed to the front side for viewing from the outside and to provide sufficient light inside. The Butterfly Park was designed with 2 chambers at the entrance and exit to avoid butterflies escaping. Descriptions of butterflies were provided at the entrance chamber for the benefit of the visitors.

A breeding section was established with a room size of 8'x 6' x 7'. Hatching boxes and strong tables to hold the boxes were provided. These tables were designed to prevent the entry of ants into the boxes. A box (1 ft x 1 ft x 1½ ft) was covered with mesh only on one side. All other sides were made of timber. At the end of 1990 the Butterfly Park had to be closed for public due to internal problems.

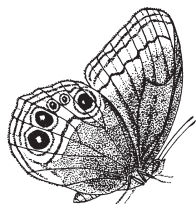
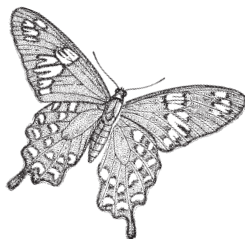
In 1995 it was reopened with an increased height of 20 ft. An internal pipe system was fixed to the roof in order to spray water to the whole park during hot periods. The cascade inside was also renovated to give a more natural environment. Selected mother plants of certain butterflies were grown inside to provide breeding habitats for butterflies.

The breeding section was expanded with the provision of 2 more rooms with the total area of 25'x5' and 14'x11'. Exhaust fans were provided inside the breeding room. Humidity was maintained between 90-98% and temperature between 26-30° C.

After reopening, the Butterfly Park was successfully managed. More than 12 species of butterflies are now kept inside the Park at a time. Since host plants are essential to keep a species, only butterflies whose host plants could be supplied are being maintained. Most of the host plants are grown in the Butterfly Park and others are grown in the Zoo Plant Nursery and Gonapala Farm which belongs to the Zoo. To avoid inbreeding, butterflies are replenished from the wild with the permission of Forest and Wildlife Departments of Sri Lanka twice a month. The butterflies exhibited in the Park are listed in Table 1 below.

Butterflies lay their eggs on host plants inside the Butterfly Park. Zookeepers collect extra eggs for the breeding section. Collected eggs start the life cycle inside breeding boxes on the parts of the mother plants artificially provided while the remaining eggs complete their life cycle inside the Butterfly Park.

**Table 1. Butterflies maintained at the Butterfly Park**



| Common Name        | Scientific Name                 | Host Plants                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Common Mormon      | <i>Papilio polytes</i>          | <i>Citrus decumana</i>      |
| Blue Tiger         | <i>Tirumala limniace mutina</i> | Family Asclepiadaceae       |
| Glassy Tiger       | <i>Parantica aglea</i>          | <i>Tylophora carnosia</i>   |
| Common Tiger       | <i>Danaus genutia</i>           | <i>Ceropegia intermedia</i> |
| Common Palm Fly    | <i>Elymnias hypermnestra</i>    | Family Palmaceae            |
| Tamil Lace Wing    | <i>Cethosia nietneri</i>        | <i>Modecca palmata</i>      |
| Jezebel            | <i>Delias eucharis</i>          | Loranthus                   |
| Small Grass Yellow | <i>Eurema brigitta</i>          | <i>Cassia multijuga</i>     |
| Crimson Rose       | <i>Pachliopta hector</i>        | Dutchmans pipe              |
| Common Rose        | <i>Pachliopta aristolochiae</i> | <i>Aristolochia indica</i>  |
| Lime Butterfly     | <i>Papileo demoleus</i>         | <i>Citrus</i> spp           |
| Blue Mormon        | <i>Papilio polymnester</i>      | <i>Citrus decumana</i>      |
| Clipper            | <i>Parthenos sylvia</i>         | <i>Adenia palmata</i>       |

**Following Butterflies are also kept from time to time.**

|                      |                           |  |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Blue Glassy Tiger    | <i>Ideopsis similis</i>   | Family Asclepiadaceae                  |
| Plain Tiger          | <i>Danaus chrysippus</i>  | <i>Calotropis gigantea</i>             |
| Common Crow          | <i>Euploea core</i>       | <i>Ficus</i> spp and <i>Nerium</i> spp |
| Lemon Emigrant       | <i>Catopsilia pomona</i>  | <i>Cassia fistula</i>                  |
| Tail Jay             | <i>Graphium agamemnon</i> | <i>Annona</i> spp.                     |
| Common Birdwing      | <i>Troides darsius</i>    | Dutchmans pipe                         |
| Common Mime          | <i>Chilasa clytia</i>     | Family Lauraceae                       |
| Common Evening Brown | <i>Melanitis leda</i>     | Grasses and paddy                      |
| Cruiser              | <i>Vindula erota</i>      | <i>Adenia palmata</i>                  |

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The duration of the life cycle of butterflies in captivity are:  
Eggs: 4-5 days; larvae: 10-14 days; pupae: 8-10 days; adult:  
14 days - 2 months. These figures vary with species.

Excess butterflies that hatch in the breeding section and the Park are released out. Usually approx. 2000 - 4000 butterflies are released outside the Butterfly Park every year.

In addition to natural flowers, bee honey is provided in fiberglass containers which are designed like flowers. Also some fruits like pineapple, are provided for the butterflies to suck the juice.

During heavy rains it is very difficult to manage the Butterfly Park because most butterflies die. Also on highly crowded days the Butterfly Park has to be closed because the sweat of visitors causes the death of butterflies. Usually water is sprayed only in the morning and afternoon. During hot days water is sprayed few times more than the usual. Once there was a problem of fungus growing in breeding boxes due to lack of sunlight in the breeding section. After cutting the branches of the trees on the breeding room and washing the boxes with boiling water the fungus was wiped out.

Mr. L.P. Jayantha who has 28 years of experience as an animal keeper, is in charge of the Butterfly Park. He is assisted by Mr. R.A. Rathnasiri who has about 8 years of experience in this field. Both are dedicated keepers who thoroughly understand their work.

The Butterfly Park helps almost all Sri Lankan people for close observation of butterflies. Advanced Level School Students also do a lot of project work on butterflies with the children of the Butterfly Park. Zoo employees, specially butterfly keepers try to propagate the species using various host plants. University students who do entomology also use the Butterfly Park for their studies.

We are hoping to open the breeding section for the public next. The design has been completed. According to the design, public can enter the breeding section through a new door inside the Butterfly Park. The viewing section is also to be made to the same height of the Park using some mesh. In this way the Butterfly Park will be even more fascinating and educational.

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## Sri Lanka Wildlife Veterinarians' Association (SLWVA) formed

The Veterinarians of the Departments of the National Zoological Gardens and Wild Life Conservation has formed a group named Sri Lanka Wild Life Veterinarians' Association recently.

The main objectives are

- ▶ To upgrade the wildlife veterinary sector in Sri Lanka.
- ▶ To coordinate training opportunities in wildlife medicine, management and conservation in Sri Lanka.
- ▶ To exchange ideas and to upgrade knowledge.
- ▶ To collaborate with other institutions and organizations which deal with wildlife.

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**The first office bearers are:**

|                 |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| President       | Dr. B.V.P. Perera        |
| Vice President  | Dr. G.U.S.P. Mendis      |
| Secretary       | Dr. C.G. Wijesinghe      |
| Asst. Secretary | Dr. B.A.D.S. Jayawardene |
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