

Date: December 18, 2009



15193 Olive Boulevard

Chesterfield, MO 63017

phone (636) 530-0076

fax (636) 530-1516

www.butterflyhouse.org

Development Office:

PO. Box 299

St. Louis, MO 63166

phone (314) 577-5154

fax (314) 577-0243

a division of the



ACCREDITED BY THE
**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**

**MARCH MORPHO MANIA™ OFFERS BUTTERFLY HOUSE
VISITORS AN UNRIVALED EXPERIENCE**
Be Immersed in More Than 3,000 Tropical Blue Morpho Butterflies

WHAT: March Morpho Mania™ 2010
WHEN: Mar. 2 through 31 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesdays through Sundays
(closed Mondays)
WHERE: Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House, 15193 Olive Blvd. in Faust Park
COST: \$6 adults, \$4 ages three to 12. Free children ages two and under.
INFO: www.butterflyhouse.org; (636) 530-0076

(ST. LOUIS): **March Morpho Mania™** returns to the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House, offering visitors an experience like no other. Throughout the month of March, step inside the tropical conservatory to be immersed in **more than 3,000** iridescent **blue morpho butterflies** in free flight, *ten times* the usual number!

“To be surrounded by this concentration of blue morphos is truly an awe-inspiring experience,” said Joe Norton, director of the Butterfly House. “We don’t know of anywhere else where you will encounter this many of these incredible butterflies at any one time. It’s certainly a month not to be missed!”

Now in its third year, the popular event has been expanded to meet visitor demand. Guests can enjoy a **total immersion experience** from **9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays, Mar. 2 through 31** (closed Mondays). The Butterfly House will stock its display with approximately twice the number of tropical blue morphos as last year, and three times the number from its inaugural event in 2008.

“With this volume of butterflies, the conservatory will constantly be filled with action,” said Norton.

You can’t ordinarily catch a glimpse of Common Blue Morpho (*Morpho peleides*) butterflies in the U.S., as the species is only native to Central and South America. They are a visitor favorite at the Butterfly House, easily identified by the

(over)

ADD ONE: March Morpho Mania

bright blue wings which are used to establish territory, signal to mates, and fool predators in their native habitat. The brilliant blue isn't actually a colored pigment at all, but rather the effect of refracted light on their scaled wings, making the color appear to change depending on the angle of view. At roost, the mottled brown underside of the butterflies' closed wings helps them to blend in with their surroundings, once again fooling predators who mistake their spots for animal eyes. When open, the wingspan of the Common Blue Morpho can reach up to eight inches.

What appears to be a random flight pattern is actually a purposeful activity. Males cruise about during the day to establish a territory and attract females. If another male invades the space, he is soon chased away. At night, the butterflies roost on the underside of large leaves and branches in the forest understory. When hungry, blue morphos feast on such delicacies as rotting fruit, tree sap, dung and dead animal carcass. At the Butterfly House, the animals' vegetarian diet mainly consists of bananas and other fruits presented on hanging feeding plates.

The Common Blue Morpho butterflies on display during March Morpho Mania all hail from one butterfly farming operation in Costa Rica called El Bosque Nuevo. This farming effort represents an alternative choice to more damaging forms of agriculture, and also allows for the restoration of native habitat, increasing the potential for species of native animals and plants to survive in the wild.

Throughout the month, visitors will learn about the critical role butterflies play in nature, and how the Butterfly House is participating in this particular conservation effort in Costa Rica. **Each weekend from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., enjoy activities designed for all ages** focused on different aspects of the country. Saturday and Sunday, Mar. 6 and 7, learn about the mysterious stone sculptures of Costa Rica's eastern Caribbean coast. Activities on Mar. 13 and 14 will delve into the significant global loss of amphibians and how it has impacted the frog populations of Costa Rica's Pacific coast. Mar. 20 and 21 will focus on the Guanacaste Region and the "jewels" of Costa Rica, its blue morpho butterflies. Mar. 27 and 28 features games from the Central Valley.

The 3,000 Common Blue Morphos aren't the only frequent flyers visitors will encounter inside the 80-degree, 8,000-square-foot glass conservatory. Approximately 1,000 other tropical butterflies representing over 60 of the world's species are also on display daily. Spot the Orange

(more)

ADD TWO: March Morpho Mania

Barred Tiger, Gold Rim Swallowtail, Scarlet Mormon, Green Banded Peacock, Magnificent Owl and more flitting about the lush tropical greenery and waterfalls.

Step into the exhibit hall to encounter dozens of other living insect and arachnid displays. See a fluorescing Desert Hairy Scorpion, colorful Jungle Nymphs and Yellow Taxi Cab Beetles, Black Widow and Brown Recluse spiders, a colony of 3,000 Orange Head Roaches and more.

Stop by the Madame Butterfly Gift Shop to browse for butterfly-inspired gifts, educational toys, books and souvenirs for all ages.

The Butterfly House is located at 15193 Olive Blvd. at Faust Park in Chesterfield, Mo., easily accessible from Interstate 64 at exit #19B. Hours through Memorial Day are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays (closed Mondays). The last ticket is sold 30 min. prior to closing each day.

Admission is \$6 for adults (ages 13 to 64), \$4.50 for seniors (ages 65 and over), and \$4 for children (ages three to 12). Children ages two and under and Missouri Botanical Garden members are free.

Visitors are welcome to take snapshots for their own personal use using a hand-held camera only; please, no tripods, monopods or external flash equipment.

For more information, visit www.butterflyhouse.org or call (636) 530-0076.

The Butterfly House is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and a division of the Missouri Botanical Garden.

###

NOTE: Digital images available by request. Download media materials at www.butterflyhouse.org/press.

The mission of the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House is to foster a greater understanding of plant and animal relationships in the environment in order to promote the conservation and restoration of natural habitats.