

**Partnering for Ohio Butterflies:
An evaluation of educational events
and temporary exhibits about butterflies
at three zoos**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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December 2004

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Introduction

The Butterfly Conservation Initiative (BFCI) initiated a project to create large-scale butterfly habitat at *the Wilds* in Ohio in conjunction with five AZA-accredited zoos in Ohio and with funding from the George Gund Foundation. Three of these zoos (Akron Zoo, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and Toledo Zoo) hosted butterfly or insect festivals in 2003 and 2004 that involved educational events and/or temporary exhibits. The purpose of these festivals was to build support for the restoration work and increase public understanding about the impacts of human activities on ecosystem health and function.

A survey instrument was designed by the Communications Research department at Brookfield Zoo and administered by volunteers at each of the three Ohio zoos during their respective festivals in order to:

- Characterize the people who visited the butterfly festivals in terms of their knowledge and interest in butterflies
- Document visitor impressions of the butterfly festivals
- Determine if the butterfly festivals had any effect on visitor awareness/interest in insects in general and butterfly activities in particular

This summary includes short descriptions of each of the three festivals and highlights some of the surveys' results. More information about the methods used to administer the survey, detailed survey results, and further festival recommendations can be found in the larger report. Please contact the BFCI to obtain a copy of this report.

The Festivals

The Akron Zoo hosted a butterfly festival, *Zoobilation*, on Sunday, June 15, 2003. *Zoobilation* used a butterfly theme to celebrate the opening of the Lehner Family Zoo Gardens while a Rock 'n Roll theme was used throughout the zoo to celebrate the zoo's 50th anniversary. Events at the festival included a ribbon cutting ceremony and butterfly release. Guests received a free butterfly fan and a copy of *Ohio Wild*, a children's magazine and a craft table was set up to create butterfly Father's Day cards. Interpreters were stationed throughout the Zoo Gardens to talk about the gardens and butterfly conservation and zoo staff performed an education skit about how people impact their environment. Educational displays about butterflies were set up in Nature's View and a classroom while in Farmland, children planted seeds in containers that they could take home.

An Insect Fair was held at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium on Sunday, October 19 and Monday, October 20 (9 am – 3 pm), 2003. Sunday was geared towards families while Monday mostly served school groups. Activities included a puppet show, arts and crafts activities, handouts, live insects (some touchable, some not) and informational displays. Displays covered topics ranging from butterfly gardening to bees and pollinators to the role of bats in an ecosystem. Handouts included seeds and instructions for building a butterfly garden, posters, plastic insects, bookmarks and a Common Butterflies and Skippers of Ohio identification booklet. Crafts included egg carton insects, butterfly pendants, dragonfly necklaces, nature journals, leaf cutter ant booklets, dung beetle hats, insect rubbings and ladybug bracelets.

The Toledo Zoo held a Bug and Butterfly Festival on August 28, 2004. Events during the day included guided tours of the zoo's nonpublic butterfly conservation center, butterfly garden, and invertebrate collection in the Museum of Science building. A butterfly gardening class and an insect photography workshop were also offered. Several tables were set up to teach children and adults about butterflies, insects, and conservation. These tables included arts and crafts activities and displays of live insects and other arthropods. A puppeteer and musician performed throughout the day.

The Audience

Audiences at each of the zoos had many similarities. Both Festival participants and non-attendees tended to be 30 – 49 years old and female (approximately 72% at each zoo) and tended to have children (75% had children at Columbus Zoo and 86% had children at the other two zoos). The majority of both Festival participants and non-attendees were members at the Akron and Columbus Zoos, while most were non-members at the Toledo Zoo.

The vast majority of the respondents had not visited the Wilds in southeastern Ohio, but of the three zoos, Columbus had the highest percentage of people who had been there (28%). At all three zoos, the vast majority of respondents did not have special training or hobbies related to butterflies.

Visitor Impressions of the Butterfly Festivals and Interest in Butterflies

The average amount of time that visitors spent at the Akron Zoo's festival was 19.7 minutes, 42.2 minutes at the Columbus Zoo's festival, and 43 minutes at the Toledo Zoo's festival, but the ranges at each zoo varied largely. For all three zoos, the more time people spent at the festivals, the more likely they were to say that the festival increased their awareness of insects and their links to habitat and human activities. There was a significant relationship at the Akron Zoo between the amount of time spent at the festival and likelihood to say the festival provided ideas for how to help preserve butterflies and their habitats.

A number of open-ended questions were asked in the survey, including one that asked visitors to identify their favorite part of the festival. At the Akron Zoo, respondents most frequently mentioned the butterfly release, followed by the maze and gardens. Several respondents at the Columbus Zoo said that "eating bugs" was their favorite part, while many others mentioned the live insects and seeing their children interact with them. A large number also referred to the crafts and activities. A number of respondents at the Toledo Zoo mentioned the live displays of butterflies, including close-up looks, and the informative presenters. The hands-on experiences and crafts for the children were also popular.

When presented with a list of butterfly-related activities that might be of interest to them, visitors expressed the most interest in attracting butterflies to their yards, followed by learning to identify butterflies, and learning about butterfly conservation issues. At the Columbus Zoo, festival visitors were more likely than zoo visitors that did not attend to festival to have an interest in volunteering to help restore butterfly habitat and volunteering to collect butterfly data. Other butterfly-related options presented in the survey were raising caterpillars and doing something artistic with butterflies.

Fifty-six percent of the Akron Zoo respondents, 42% of the Columbus Zoo respondents, and 72% of the Toledo Zoo respondents indicated an interest in Ohio restoration projects for butterflies.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The festivals cannot be compared directly since the formats at each zoo were very different. However a few patterns emerged that can inform future festivals. For example, respondents indicated that they especially enjoyed:

- Hands-on activities and crafts for children
- Close-up experiences with live butterflies
- Information about butterfly gardening and attracting butterflies to their yard
- Information about butterfly identification
- Information about butterfly conservation issues

In addition to being fun, survey results suggest that butterfly festivals have the potential to increase awareness of insects and their links to habitat. The more time spent at the festivals, the more likely people were to claim this greater awareness. Also, based on how Festival participants and non-attendees rated their butterfly knowledge, the festivals seem to increase knowledge about butterflies.

In conclusion, butterflies offer an exciting potential for studying the links between caring about a charismatic animal and conservation action. This study provides some feedback for how to engage and inform the public through butterfly festivals and how to measure the results.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to the volunteers who collected data at the Akron, Columbus, and Toledo Zoos and to Eric Reinhard, Ruth Allard, and Shelly Grow for their assistance in coordinating data collecting efforts at the three locations. Funding for this study was provided by the George Gund Foundation.