

MISSOULA BUTTERFLY HOUSE & INSECTARIUM

NEWS



The Buzz Better Than Normal!

By Jen Marangelo, Executive Director

Summer 2020

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Our Mission

The Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium inspires an appreciation and understanding of insects and their relatives.



Greenish Blue (*Plebejus saepiolus*)

To say that we are navigating unprecedented times is an understatement. Across Montana, our country, and the world, the past months have presented significant personal and professional challenges. Amidst socially distanced conversations with friends, family, and colleagues discussions often turned toward the desire of "getting back to normal." And while we all obviously want that, I say let's get back to "better than normal."

Challenging times don't change what we'd like to see in the future. In fact, when the chips are down it often strengthens our personal resolve to reach for the dreams we've been working toward.

As you'll see in this newsletter, in order to continue delivering our unique education programs, over the past year the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium needed to transform our efforts not once, but twice. First due to our planned closure of the Insectarium, and second due to the need for social distancing. Thanks to the creativity and flexibility of our staff we've not only maintained our programs but adjusted with the times to bring online education

opportunities into classrooms as well as homes. After launching our live Online Bug Encounters on Facebook, one of the many parents suddenly adjusting to kids learning from home commented, "This is the longest stretch of silence I have had with the kids! You are a lifesaver!"

In regard to the capital campaign we had recently launched to build our new facility featuring a tropical butterfly house, we took the opportunity to revamp our outreach to potential donors – going from the traditional "in-person meeting" to an online PowerPoint presentation via Zoom that paints the picture of our exciting future. I'm happy to say that the silent phase of our campaign is going well, that our plans remain on track, and that our progress continues.

Yes, we've all experienced plenty of challenges these past months. But addressing them has opened new doors to alternatives that ultimately strengthen our overall efforts, adding new tools to a tool box that continues to expand. So, once again, I say let's get back to "better than normal." And the opening of our new facility will be a great place to start. 🐛

Need a bug fix?

We've got you covered. Check out our website for our Online Bug Encounters and other bug-filled resources including Notes From the Lab, our What's Buzzin' report, some "In your yard" activities for the kiddos, and more at missoulabutterflyhouse.org.

Education Transformation - Round 2



Polyphemus Moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*)



A year ago, we initiated a short-term transformation within our education programs as we went from “destination based” to a more mobile mode of operation. Due to the many challenges COVID-19 has placed on in-person programming, earlier this year we began round two of changes.

Our flexible and creative staff quickly transitioned many of our education programs to online formats. With in-person programming looking doubtful for the foreseeable future, we’re focusing on these and other remote learning opportunities:

Distance Learning: We transitioned our in-person field trips to online, offering access to engaging programs like Bug Biomimicry; Super Spiders; Little Things, Big Jobs; Creative Creatures; and more. Teachers supply a webcam, microphone, internet, and some excited students, and we fill in the rest!

Online Bug Encounters: On March 18th we launched our first Facebook Live Online Bug Encounter, receiving over 3,000 viewers. Since then, we’ve hosted over thirty additional programs, covering different topics (with new creepy crawlies) each time. So far, we’ve helped over 21,000 viewers “get their bug on.”

Streamable Learning: Working with our partners at the Montana Natural History Center, we’ve been able to reach school children in Montana and across the country through this virtual field trip platform.

Notes from the Lab: This relatively new weekly email gives you a front row seat to what happens behind-the-scenes at MBHI as well as a deep dive into different topics from around the arthropod world.

In addition to these and other online efforts, our Bug Bytes podcast (mtpr.org/programs/bug-bytes) and weekly What’s Buzzin’ report continue to keep bugging you (pun very much intended).

Until in-person education opportunities return, we’ll continue to use these and other remote learning tools to bring the world of insects and arthropods into classrooms and homes across Montana. Missing out? Not sure how to connect? Check out our website for more information or send an email to info@missoulabutterflyhouse.org. 🐛

Butterfly Licence Plate

Getting a new or used vehicle? Or maybe you are ready to renew your registration? Give your ride some wings! For an extra \$20 added to your annual registration, you can spread a bit of butterfly love. All proceeds go to support our education programs, amazing critters, and efforts to open our new facility. Contact us for more information or visit your County Treasurer’s office to get yours today!



Citizen Science at MBHI

As part of our outreach and education efforts, the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium is currently engaged in multiple citizen science projects. While these projects are primarily being conducted internally this year, they are serving as “pilot projects” for future efforts to involve students and volunteers in field research supporting science and conservation.

The most recent project on deck is a pilot project led by the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory DNA Learning Center. The project, called US Ants, is an NIH-funded collaborative effort to engage citizen scientists in DNA barcoding. The study will ultimately map the distribution of various ant species across the US. In the years ahead, our hope is to engage middle, high school and college

students in the fascinating science of genomics.

We also began a multi-year collaborative insect survey this season. The study aims to better understand and document the decline in insect populations being experienced across the country. It's easy to get sucked into the doom and gloom predictions of the “insect apocalypse,” but through outreach and education, we hope to provide tools and resources to help mitigate insect declines.

Our longest running citizen-science project is a long-term butterfly survey in collaboration with MPG Ranch. The survey is conducted bi-weekly from May through September with the purpose of observing changes in relative abundance of butterfly species and populations in response to habitat restoration efforts. If you restore it, will they come? We're finding out.

As we tackle these (and other) projects in the future, we'll continue to investigate how we can incorporate citizen science into our education efforts, while actively engaging students and volunteers in field research with real-world implications.



Introducing the BugMobile!

With the transformation of our education programs to a more mobile mode of operation last fall, we went from having school classes and fellow bug lovers swarming to the Insectarium to taking the show (and our critters) on the road. Too much travel to expect staff to use their personal vehicles. By December, we were actively searching for our BugMobile.

Thanks to a generous donor (who wishes to remain anonymous), a sponsorship donation from our friends at Worden Thane, and the response of supporters like you to our 2019 summer appeal, in January we acquired our vehicle.

And while this originally “Griz maroon” SUV was more than adequate in appearance, it took the creative touch of AlphaGraphics to really bring the BugMobile to life. We could not be happier. Lots of “thumbs up” as we traverse town ...and even some insect questions while pumping gas. Keep your eyes open for the BugMobile when you are out and about and be sure to give us a wave.



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Missoula Butterfly House &
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MISSOULA BUTTERFLY HOUSE & INSECTARIUM STAFF

Jen Marangelo
Executive Director

Brenna Shea
Lead Animal Keeper

Carolyn Taber
Museum Educator

Glenn Marangelo
Development Director

Sam McFarland
Animal Care Intern

Karen Weaver
Interpretive Content Creator

Summer 2020



P.O. Box 8885
Missoula, MT 59807

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Keep Us Buzzin'

Thanks to the dedication and support of friends like you, our unique education programs remain strong as we focus on realizing our long-term dream of opening a larger facility featuring a tropical butterfly house. Ranging from donations that are vital to supporting our education efforts and operations to opportunities to make a lasting impact through our capital campaign, your support has never been more important. Please consider making a donation today! Online at www.missoulabutterflyhouse.org.

If you have questions about our programs, making a general donation, or considering a gift to our capital campaign, please contact Glenn at 406-317-1211 or glenn@missoulabutterflyhouse.org.



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