



Figure 1 (above): The flight area of the "Neotropical Butterfly Park".

Figure 2 (below): One of the greenhouses, where large amounts of food plants for caterpillars are grown.



Focus on education: The “Neotropical Butterfly Park” in Suriname

ARTICLE

Torsten M. van der Heyden

Immenweide 83
D-22523 Hamburg
Germany
tmvdh@web.de

Photos: Amira Mendieta-Eriks



Torsten van der Heyden was born in Hamburg in 1959. His special interest in Lepidoptera started during his studies at the University of Hamburg – especially during several field trips. He wrote a thesis on migrational behaviour of different Lepidoptera species. After finishing his studies he worked as a biologist in Butterfly Houses in Germany and on the Canary Islands/Spain in the late eighties. On the Canary Islands he did research on several species of Lepidoptera and Heteroptera. Since then he has published various papers and articles – especially on butterfly migration, the biology, ecology and distribution of butterflies. From 1999 until 2006 he lived and worked in Costa Rica. Today he lives in Hamburg where he is working as a teacher of Biology and Geography. He is a member of various societies and associations: Royal Entomological Society (FRES), The Linnean Society of London (FLS), Deutsche Forschungszentrale für Schmetterlingswanderungen, Entomologischer Verein Apollo e. V., Deutsche Gesellschaft für allgemeine und angewandte Entomologie e. V., Sociedad Hispano-Luso-Americana de Lepidopterología, Asociación española de Entomología, Real Sociedad Española de Historia Natural, Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica and Fotografía y Biodiversidad.

Back in 1996 Amira Mendieta-Eriks, who originally comes from Ecuador, and her husband Ewout Eriks, who studied Tropical Agriculture in the Netherlands, started their butterfly business “Neotropical Insects” in Lelydorp (district Wanica), a village near Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, located in the coastal northern part of South America.

The main focus of “Neotropical Insects” was and still is the professional breeding of tropical butterflies and the export of pupae – mainly to the United States. Twenty-two butterfly species of Suriname are reared at “Neotropical Insects”.

Information and education have become another main focus of the owners of that business since last year, when the “Neotropical Butterfly Park” was officially opened on July 16th, 2010 in Lelydorp. All butterflies shown in the flight area are reared in the breeding facilities of the sister company “Neotropical Insects”.

The main purpose of the butterfly park is to provide an educational facility for tourists – from Suriname and abroad – and for pupils from the neighbourhood: Especially children from the Elementary School of Lelydorp who visit the “Neotropical Butterfly Park” to learn more about the life of these insects.

“Usually they get the lesson about the butterfly at school but due to the lack of materials the schools organize school trips to the Butterfly Park. At the park the children get a tour around the farm, where they get to see real life butterflies, eggs, caterpillars, pupae and the lifecycle of a butterfly and learn about the butterfly anatomy”, stated Amira Mendieta-Eriks.

Besides, the “Neotropical Butterfly Park” offers a hand-painted 3 metres high and 40 metres long realistic

panoramic view of typical landscapes of Suriname, an educational space, an expo area and an insect museum. “In the insect museum there are all kinds of insects that one can find in Suriname. It is also important for the children to know which kinds we have in Suriname”, said Amira Mendieta-Eriks.

Thinking ahead, Amira Mendieta-Eriks and her crew at the “Neotropical Butterfly Park” have another dream: “At the moment we can’t afford to do research, maybe in the future...”



Fig. 3: A guide from the park explains the different kinds of pupae, colour, size and camouflage to a group of pupils.