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Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History Opens New Exhibition Hall "Butterflies + Plants: Partners in Evolution"

Beginning Feb. 15, visitors to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History can enjoy one of its most interactive and educational exhibitions to date. "Butterflies + Plants: Partners in Evolution," a new permanent exhibition, innovatively combines traditional and experiential learning to provide visitors a rare, up-close look at how butterflies and plants have evolved and diversified together for millions of years.

"We are thrilled to announce the opening of this exciting new exhibition," said Elizabeth Duggal, associate director for external affairs and public programs at the National Museum of Natural History. "'Butterflies + Plants' brings the museum's mission to life by inspiring curiosity and discovery about the natural world. Visitors of all ages will undoubtedly 'feel the flutter' both during and long after they have experienced this wonderful exhibition."

Designed by Smithsonian scientists, "Butterflies + Plants" provides two distinct offerings: the Exhibition Hall and the Live Butterfly Pavilion.

The Exhibition Hall takes visitors on a historical journey through the co-evolution of butterflies and plants—an experience that spans more than 180 million years, from the Jurassic period to modern times. An array of colorful murals, timelines, videos and photographs support the exhibitions underlying themes of survival and evolution. Visitors will learn interesting facts about how these organisms have changed throughout time. For example, moths have outlived dinosaurs by millions of years and originally had teeth-like structures that enabled them to chew their food. The exhibition also reveals how the hairstreak caterpillar can turn the same color as the flower it eats.

The Live Butterfly Pavilion sets a new standard for museum biology halls in both content and design. Walking into the tropical aromatic garden, visitors will be met with warm, humid air and bright lights that stimulate the species' native climate. This sensation will be enhanced by more than

400 live butterflies interacting with a variety of plant species, including jasmine, pentas, lantana, verbena, clerodendron, jatropha and more. New butterfly species from Africa, Asia and North, Central and South America will be introduced to the Pavilion on a weekly basis, offering visitors a wide variety of butterflies to discover and enjoy every time they explore the exhibition.

Based on the study of co-evolution, “Butterflies + Plants” examines how organisms interact with one another and how they change from generation to generation because of those interactions. Though butterflies and plants are the central focus of the exhibition, a variety of organisms—from bats to beetles—and their interactions with plants also are featured.

“Co-evolution tells us that all species—even humans—play a role in the evolution of the natural community,” said exhibit manager Nate Erwin. “With the knowledge that 99 percent of all species that inhabited the Earth are now extinct, it is important that we all gain a better understanding of nature’s complexity in order to conserve life as we know it today.”

An innovative visitor’s guide to the exhibition will be made available free of charge through the generous support of HSBC Bank USA, N.A.

“Butterflies + Plants: Partners in Evolution” is located on the second floor of the museum, adjacent to the ever-popular O. Orkin Insect Zoo. While a \$6 admission fee (\$5 for children, 2-12) is required to enter the Live Butterfly Pavilion, the Exhibition Hall is free. The admission fee was established to defray costs associated with populating the Pavilion, including the purchase of the butterflies from exotic locations around the world and ongoing care. Entrance to the Live Butterfly Pavilion will be free to all on Tuesdays.

To ensure access at the desired time of entry, visitors are encouraged to purchase tickets in advance online at <http://butterflies.si.edu> or by calling (202) 633-4629. Tickets also are available onsite at the museum and at select IMAX ticket counters located at other Smithsonian museums.

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., is the most visited natural history museum in the world. Opened in 1910, the museum is dedicated to maintaining and preserving the world’s most extensive collection of natural history specimens and human artifacts. It also fosters critical scientific research as well as educational programs and exhibitions that present the work of its scientists and curators to the public.

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