



CHRISTOPHER KING

Carleton biology students tie butterfly pupae to dowels in preparation for the 10-day butterfly show that runs October 4 – 13 at the Nesbitt Building.

By Susan Hickman

The oversized multi-toned Blue Morpho, the iridescent Emerald Swallowtail and the delicate black-and-white “rice paper” White Nymph will be among the 25 different species of butterflies fluttering through two display greenhouses for Carleton’s annual butterfly show in October. Leading up to the show, greenhouse manager Edward Bruggink had to work around the clock to prepare for the more than 1,000

butterflies that will grace the biology department’s Nesbitt Building this year for the show that runs from October 4 to 13. “I started this back in 1999,”

says Bruggink, who has tenderly nurtured more tropical plants this year than ever before for the butterflies’ benefit. “I was trying to raise awareness of the greenhouses. By hosting a butterfly show, we were able to bring in a lot of people.” Since that first show nine years ago, the live butterfly ex-

hibition at Carleton has become one of the biggest attractions in the city. “We’ve had long lineups with as many as a thousand individuals walking through the door in one day,” recalls Bruggink. “It’s packed in here. Standing room only. Shoulder to shoulder in the greenhouses.”

Carleton biology professor Jayne Yack, who has helped with the exhibition in the Nesbitt Building, recently received an Early Researcher Award

from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation for her innovative work on insect communication. She studies how insects use sensory systems and how butterflies, for example, use ears on their wings to detect predatory bats and birds. The exhibition includes educational videos about the insects as well as how to plan a garden that will attract butterflies, for example.

But what really draws the crowds, suggests Bruggink, is

the “delicacy” of the insect. “It brings back a sense of childhood, of chasing butterflies in meadows. They look like little fairies,” says Bruggink, who favours the highly visible Emerald Swallowtail.

About a week and a half before the exhibit opens, Bruggink received the first shipment of some 250 chrysalises or pupae, the hard shell the caterpillar creates before emerging for its short-lived reproductive stage.

“The pupa form is a well-protected state for shipment,” Bruggink explains. “I’ve built special cages for them and biology students will come into the nursery to pin them up on dowels. It’s about three hours’ work.”

Once the wings are dry, in three to five days, the butterflies will emerge and they will be transferred to the display greenhouses, where they will fly around looking for a mate.

“The ritual of mating is magical. They dance around each other,” says Bruggink, who has timed a series of shipments to arrive to keep the exhibition alive. Also available for viewing are 20 night-flying Atlas moths, which have 30-centimetre wing spans.

This year, Bruggink has also taken care to build up a wonderful showing of nectar plants in the display greenhouses: pentas (Egyptian star), lantanas, jasmine and passion flower, for example.

“I make sure they are taken care of and healthy for the butterflies to feed on. And I set out dishes of rotting fruit, like pineapple, banana and wedges of orange.”

While 800 children are booked for tours to the annual exhibition, Bruggink says adults are just as mesmerized by the butterflies.