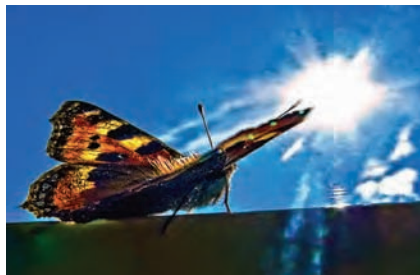


BUTTERFLY FLIES AWAY

SAMIYA FATIMA

LONG gone are the days when our backyards were hangouts for the beautiful winged jewels. Excited little kids would run around trying to catch them. And when they touched the brightly coloured wings, the butterfly would leave its sparkle behind. How often do we see butterflies around us these days? One of God's most wonderful creatures is in danger and it's about time we humans did something about it.



Isn't it frightening to imagine the fate of butterflies similar to that of dinosaurs? The little weightless creature will no longer be filling up our lives. In the next twenty years or so, humans would be seeing butterflies, not just butterflies, but also larvae, caterpillar, and pupae only in books and pictures. Not many little kids would be drawing butterflies in their pre-school because they would not have seen any. Butterflies would only flit around in cartoons and adorn the pretty little dresses of girls.

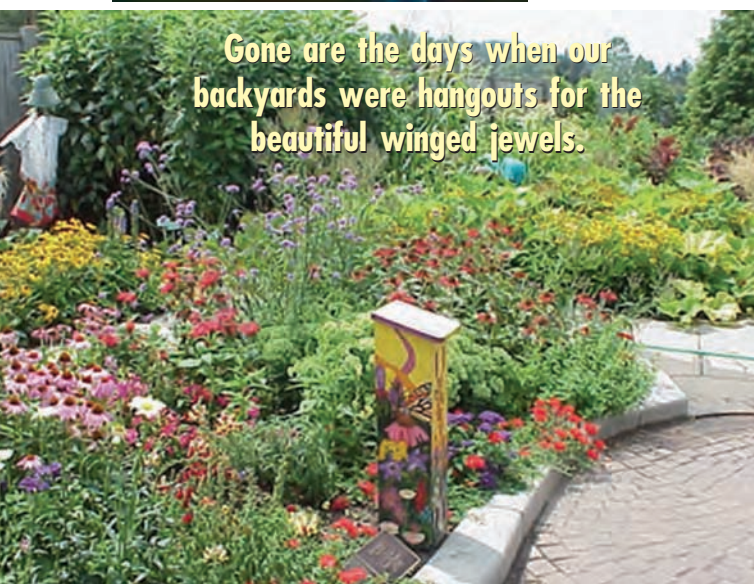
Kids will not be the only ones missing the butterflies. Plants that depend on insects for pollination will also miss them greatly, especially the beautiful flowering ones. Butterflies play a very important role in pollination. Every living organism has an important role in the web of life; so do the butterflies. Butterflies are selfless creatures and when they fly on to the flowers in search of their food – nectar – they thank the flowers by helping in pollination.

As a matter of fact, ants love to eat caterpillars. However, the caterpillars of the blue butterflies have evolved a symbiotic relationship that is mutually beneficial. Most blue butterfly caterpillars have glands on the 11th and 12th segments which secrete a sugary solution, like honey dew. The ants harvest the honey dew from the caterpillar and in return protect them from other predators. This co-evolution has resulted in butterflies laying eggs, in places where ants are in abundance.

And they have also been doing their bit in reducing global warming. Butterflies are cold-blooded animals. To maintain their body temperatures they absorb heat from their surroundings. Although it is just a drop in the ocean, it does help in reducing global warming to a minute extent.

Having such aesthetic beauty attached with them, it is no wonder they have become a target of smugglers. This has been a major concern in India. Rare

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Where will the butterflies find a place to live in this concrete jungle?



Black market butterflies

Butterfly collecting has come a long way since the Victorian caricature of Englishmen in Khaki shorts with enormous nets. Rare butterflies can fetch more than \$ 10,000 on the black market.



Butterfly smuggling in India has been recorded from way back in 1994, when two German tourists, Heckar Hermann Henrich and Weigert Ludwig, who came to India as tourists, were detained at the Indira Gandhi Airport



and those listed in the endangered list are in great demand. They are killed, dried and used in greeting cards, wall plate hangings and for other decorative purposes. People working in the plantation industry sell these natural jewels to gain extra cash. Apparently some are worth astronomical sums.

Butterfly smuggling in India has been recorded from way back in 1994, when two German tourists called Heckar Hermann Henrich and Weigert Ludwig, who came to India as tourists, were detained at the Indira Gandhi Airport as they were found with four cartons containing nearly 45,000 insects, including butterflies. These were confiscated on the spot and sent to entomologists for identification. Since then many have been arrested, but the smuggling hasn't ended yet.

Another reason for the disappearance of butterflies is the loss of

their ecosystem. Butterflies and caterpillars need plants around them, it's their food, their home. But if you see around your street, all you see is a concrete jungle. How do we expect the brightly coloured winged butterfly and equally bright caterpillars to exist without being spotted in the rather dull grey looking atmosphere?

Butterflies were present in every continent except Antarctica. According to James Speth, an environmental analyst, half the world's tropical and temperate forests are now gone. The rate of deforestation in the tropics continues at about an acre a second. About half the wetlands and a third of the mangroves are gone. Species are disappearing about a thousand times faster than normal. The planet has not seen such a spasm of extinction in 65 million years, since the dinosaurs disappeared. Persistent toxic chemicals can be found by the dozens in essentially each and every one of us.

How could the fragile butterflies have remained untouched by all this? Almost a third of the butterflies in Europe are in danger and one in ten is threatened with extinction, according to a new study.

The Director of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) says, "When talking about threatened species, people tend to think larger, more charismatic creatures such as pandas or tigers, but we mustn't forget that the small species on our planet are just as important

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and are also in need of conservation action."

Butterflies are unique in many ways; they are the only creatures with scales on their wings. They taste food by standing on it because of the location of sensors in their tiny feet. They weigh as light as two rose petals.

Can human beings be so selfish and not share the planet Earth with such beautiful and light creatures? We are supposed to be stewards of nature, taking care of it as it provided for us. Nature is infinite in its ability to sustain us.

However, it's not too late yet. There have been instances where a few species of butterflies long thought to be extinct have been spotted again. So, it's time to be a little selfless and care for other creatures. By creating a garden for the benefit of butterflies, you will not only bring some of their beauty and wonder into your yard, you will also be helping to ensure the survival of some of these lovely creatures!

Don't make conservatories the only place to find butterflies.

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