

PRESS RELEASE

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Morpho caterpillars in their fifth instar (stage) chow down on their host plant on a Costa Rican butterfly farm.

Photo by Kim Zsembik

Butterflies in Santa Barbara Got Their Start in Costa Rica

- Beloved summer exhibit returns: *Butterflies Alive!* open May 23–September 7
- The exhibit's butterflies are sustainably raised in Costa Rica through a partnership that supports small family farms.
- Guests observe butterfly behaviors up close with the opportunity for meaningful conversation about the lives of pollinators and the threats they face.
- The Sprague Pavilion is ADA accessible. Entry is \$3 in addition to Museum admission, and completely free for Members.



SANTA BARBARA, CA— A beloved summer tradition returns when *Butterflies Alive!* reopens at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History on May 23. This experience is the Museum’s most popular exhibit and has been voted into the top three butterfly gardens in the nation by the USA TODAY 10BEST Readers' Choice Awards. The top two are in Virginia and Florida, making this local favorite the best butterfly garden west of the Mississippi. Guests enter an immersive habitat buzzing with life, discovery, and connection. The exhibit runs through September 7.

The butterflies on view begin life in Costa Rica and arrive at the Museum thanks to a partnership that supports sustainable livelihoods and conservation in one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. Costa Rica Entomological Supply (CRES)—a leader in sustainable butterfly farming for over 40 years—coordinates a network of small, family-run butterfly farms that provide both economic opportunity and environmental benefits for Costa Ricans. Using best practices promoted by CRES and the International Association of Butterfly Exhibitors and Suppliers, the farmers care for adult butterflies and raise their offspring from eggs, to caterpillars, into the pupal stage. CRES coordinates the distribution of pupae around the world for exhibitions like the Museum’s. The Museum receives shipments of hundreds of pupae at a time, which are visible in the emergence chamber in Santa Barbara Gallery. Once they’ve emerged as butterflies, they live out their adult lives in the Sprague Butterfly Pavilion.

A Costa Rican butterfly farm’s footprint is often very modest: “Many people think that a butterfly farmer is this guy with a big piece of land,” says CRES Commercial Manager Sergio Siles. Actually, “it’s a guy in the backyard! They do magic there.” This unique cottage industry reflects Costa Rica’s broader commitment to conservation. As Siles explains, “We shifted as a country, the conservationist mindset that we have. It’s a highlight of the whole country.” The Museum’s Director of Guest Experience Zsembik experienced Costa Rican conservation and butterfly farming firsthand during her recent visit to CRES headquarters. She was impressed by the diligent scientific work of the Costa Rican farmers and the commitment they make in staking a deliberate personal investment in the conservationist national identity. For Zsembik, the value of the connection is clear: “In choosing CRES as a supplier, the Museum supports people and ecosystems in Costa Rica,” she says, “and in supporting our exhibit, you’re making that choice possible.”

Back in Santa Barbara, those global efforts come to life in a vibrant space designed to support butterflies’ natural behaviors. Seeing these moments up close helps visitors better understand the challenges butterflies face in the wild and the role people can play in supporting their survival. Each day, close to 1,000 live butterflies take flight inside the lush pavilion. Sunny days see a lot of fluttering, while June gloom encourages butterflies to be still for a snapshot. Guests



stroll among more than two dozen Costa Rican species, observing natural behaviors up close while connecting with the beauty and fragility of these remarkable insects.

Butterflies Alive! requires a \$3 ticket in addition to regular Museum admission. Museum Members enjoy free admission to both the Museum and the pavilion.

For more information or to plan your visit, go to sbnature.org/butterfliesalive.

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About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History connects people to nature for the betterment of both, drawing on collections that preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Central Coast and beyond. Founded in 1916, the Museum is a private nonprofit supported in part by philanthropy, membership, and visitors. Members visit free. For more information, visit sbnature.org.



The Museum's exhibit invites guests to take a closer look at butterflies. Photo by Gary Robinson

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SBMNH Director of Guest Experience Kim Zsembik visited the Museum's butterfly supplier in Costa Rica. Photo by Jonathan Hoffman?

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Zsembik with Costa Rica Entomological Supply staff at CRES offices near San Jose, Costa Rica. Photo courtesy Kim Zsembik



Butterflies Alive! Runs May 23–September 7 at Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Photo by SBMNH