

INSECT ZOOS AND BUTTERFLY HOUSES AS EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

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Although the arthropods are the most diverse group of animals on Earth, the general public knows very little about them. In many cases, general knowledge is a collection of misinformation, myth and urban legend that is passed from generation to generation and within peer groups through stories, the media and everyday conversation. The result is sometimes an indifference towards these animals, but often it is contempt for what many refer to as "creepy" creatures. In reality, arthropods are not at all deserving of how they are viewed by the average member of society and they are in fact a very important group. Unfortunately, this importance is not generally recognized because of how they are perceived. Educational programs that deal with arthropods are gaining acceptance, but sparking an interest to learn more about these animals is a very important step in the process. Insect zoos and butterfly houses are excellent ways in which to introduce a large number of people to the arthropods and why they are important. Butterfly houses are instrumental in capturing an audience because butterflies are one of the very few arthropods not seen in a negative fashion. Butterflies can be used as a starting point to arthropod interest and butterfly exhibits provide a natural link to ecology. Insect zoos may play on a concept of "shock value" to encourage the general public to visit, but they are really a novel way to reach people that might otherwise not have any interest in learning about these animals. Many misconceptions can often be addressed in even short visits as the general public is given up close and personal experiences with live arthropods. Arthropod education has perhaps never been as important or necessary as it is today as the human species tries to better understand a diversity of habitats in an effort to preserve our quality of life. Insect zoos and butterfly houses are a popular and fascinating way to engage otherwise unreachable segments of the general public and thereby aid in creating an awareness of arthropods that is more favorable. By visiting exhibits of these types, individuals tend to become more concerned with the arthropods and natural world as a whole.