

OVERVIEW OF INSECT ZOOS AND BUTTERFLY HOUSES IN THE UNITED STATES

Leslie Saul-Gershenz

Center For Ecosystem Survival, 699 Mississippi Street, Suite 106, San Francisco, CA
94107, USA

An insect zoo or insectarium is a permanent year-round exhibit facility dedicated to the display of live insects and other arthropods housed in a separate room, building, or distinct exhibit hall and maintained primarily for public visitation and education. Insect zoos have gained recognition for their educational value and broad appeal and have proven to be enormously popular with the public wherever they appear, whether modest or grand, whether showcasing native or exotic species. Today there are over 100 insect zoo exhibits throughout the world and 24 permanent year-round insect zoo and/or butterfly houses in the United States, collectively receiving millions of visitors each year. Insect zoos have been built in zoological parks, natural history museums, botanical gardens, county parks, horticultural centers, amusement parks, nature reserves, universities and on privately owned land. Interest in their development has increased (excluding the period between the first and second World Wars) with growing public interest in biodiversity and the documented success of insect exhibits. The London Zoo is credited with opening the first public insect zoo in the world in 1881. However, insectariums in United States took longer to take hold. Enduring insectariums did not appear in America until the late 1970s but have increased in number steadily for the past twenty years. Major features and key innovations of these facilities will be summarized in an historical context.