

Outlined below is a summary of the article in Butterfly News 1986 written by Margaret Watson with thanks to Gareth Ireland and Simon Reagan for permission to publish.

Many schools in the U.K. have set up butterfly gardens or houses often making use of grants from business, Government or local conservations groups.

Hawthorne Primary in Kettering is in an urban catchment area with no local green space. They set up a butterfly house in 1985 after local studies of indigenous species, collecting larvae in an old aquarium. Unidentified species were returned to the wild as feeding and pupation may have caused extra problems. They set up a breeding frame 9m² with a height of about 2m. The area had to be large enough to support the livestock during holiday periods. They planted a variety of seeds and plants in relation to the caterpillars that they had; including honeysuckle, heathers, flowering current, privet. Nettles were planted in pots to stop the roots from spreading. Fine mesh netting was used to prevent larvae from wandering off the food plant (very important tip?). Sugar water and rotting fruit was also put out as a nectar source.

Most larvae had pupated by the autumn but still needed weekly spraying in the aquarium to prevent drying up. The winter months were spent monitoring and planning the butterfly house together with visits to the Butterfly Farms at Stratford and in Syon Park, London. The winter is also a good time for research of life cycles to minimise any problems or losses in summer. The house was made of fine-mesh polypropylene net secured over a tubular frame similar to those available in garden centres. The soil was prepared by rough digging and adding compost. It also encouraged ants which in most cases are harmful to larvae, pupae and freshly emerged adults. Problems were overcome by using hanging feeding trays.

Leaves and flowers were brought in for some larvae, the water container buried to ground level and the water covered by cotton wool or something similar. Most species will eat only the food they recognise and it must be available at ground level. Plants seem more difficult to grow within a butterfly house so they must be monitored daily. Wasps must be kept out of the house as they can attack and kill butterflies. Margaret Watson recommended trying at least one exotic - but fairly common species. Apparently, the Indian Moon Moth emerged to a very excited audience! Many local amateur experts were available for advice and practical help. It was felt that the pupils involved in the project would develop a greater love and understanding of the living world. They would have a practical awareness of conservation and environmental issues. Clearly they would have an interest for life in both senses of the word.

The school still maintains their interest through Linda Walker-Hall.

