

The wonders of the Kimberley

A glimpse at its unique environment – ‘*Butterflies*’

(by Brian Kane)



There can be few more beautiful living creatures in the environment than the butterfly. The sight of its delicate looping flight and striking colours can shake us out of our busy routines and leave us pondering in amazement.

Like frogs, the presence of butterflies is a good indicator for monitoring the health of the environment. They also act as ‘flagships’ for identifying and preserving habitats which may come under threat. A decrease in number may signal an environment in trouble.

Unlike moths, which fly by night and are more known for their caterpillar stage, butterflies display their full beauty and magnificence by flying in the bright sunshine. Perhaps that is why they are referred to as the ‘birds of the insect world’.

Their life cycle occurs over four stages (egg, larva, pupa and adult) and they can vary in life span between a few weeks to several years for some species. The adults primarily feed upon nectar from various flowering plants, including eucalypts.

Australia has 416 species of butterflies of which most are to be found in the northern, coastal tropical regions where there is an abundance and diversity of plant life. In the Kimberley there are about 50 butterfly species such as the Swallowtail, Emperor, Wanderer and Jezerbel which are very eye catching but one of the most ‘flashy’ is the Varied Eggfly Butterfly. It has white discs on its wings surrounded by luminous blueish-purple circles and this contrasts starkly to its overall dark brown colour. Another beautiful species found across the Kimberley is the so called Common Crow butterfly. The female of this species lays its eggs on the leaves of plants that have a milky sap. The pupal stage lasts for about two weeks, with the developing butterfly becoming visible inside the transparent skin. The adult butterfly is ready to fly within eight hours of emerging.

Some butterflies are only found in the Kimberley such as the Black Spotted White and the Kimberley Spotted Opal while the Climena Crow butterfly is

very rare and this species has only been found in Derby and Roebourne in the Pilbara.

Butterflies fulfil an important and necessary role in our environment and they are a delight to behold.