

Reading Explorer 2, Unit 11: Kenya Butterflies

Narrator:

The Abuku Sokoke Forest is home to more than a third of Kenya's eight hundred and seventy species of butterfly.

The demand for unusual butterfly species for public and private collections has long been a threat to natural environments such as this Kenyan forest.

In the past, butterfly collectors caught thousands of insects from the wild, sending live animals to Europe and the U.S. It's sad to say that most probably died before they arrived.

Several years ago local farmers decided to use their capabilities for a different project—rearing caterpillars.

The caterpillars are sent around the world as pupae and arrive just in time to become adult African butterflies. These butterflies have a survival rate of nearly one hundred percent.

Wellington Combo:

"Abu Sokoke Forest is important because it is the largest remaining coastal forest in East Africa."

Narrator:

The main threats to the forests, he says, are cutting down the trees to make places to live. Now people are better educated, and they can see the benefits of keeping the forests. They are getting income from butterfly farming, bee keeping, and from plants that can be used for medicine.

Wellington Combo:

"So at least they have seen the benefits of having the forest stay."

Narrator:

This is the project's headquarters, right in the heart of the forest. Farmers from all over the region come here to breed the butterflies. The price of each species varies a lot according to international supply and demand, so these farmers have to know which butterflies buyers want to buy.

Much of the credit for the project's success must go to this man—Washington Iemba.

Washington Iemba:

"The Butterfly Farm started in 1993 and the objective then was to develop local support for the conservation of Abuku Sokoke Forest."

Narrator:

Until recently, he says, many of his fellow community members objected to the way the forest was managed because they couldn't derive income from it. But he says that farming butterflies has now become attractive, as it constitutes a new source of income.

Washington Iemba:

"Now, most of the farmers even know the botanical names like any university student."

Narrator:

The process involves community members first catching a small number of butterflies. These are then carefully released into a closed area.

The females lay their eggs and caterpillars finally emerge. After they pupate, or enter their cocoons, the caterpillars are brought to the project center where the farmers receive money for their work.

Washington Iemba:

"What do you have for us today? These ones are very good, in fact you can see they are shaking, shaking, showing that they are still very fresh, but if you remember to have Monideas, because Monideas at the moment is the one that has a lot of market space."

Narrator:

Each farmer retains a small number of pupae so that the entire process can be repeated without having to collect new insects from the wild.

Washington Iemba:

"In a year we sell pupae worth almost sixty thousand US dollars; of these, sixty percent goes to the local communities mostly for food, and school uniforms, school fees, hospital bills. The most attractive aspect has been that, unlike other programs used in forest areas, this has quick returns. Within one month of farming butterflies one is able to generate income and use it, and therefore adding more value to the program itself."

Narrator:

In the beginning, one hundred workers cooperated to start the project. Now there are more than one thousand. The success of the Butterfly Project has resulted in similar projects being established in parks all over Kenya.