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Lee Durrell, widow of author Gerald Durrell, reports Sudeshna



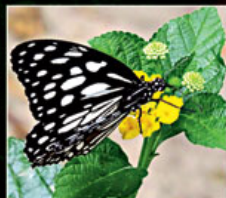
Lee Durrell releases butterflies bred at the Nature Mates laboratory in Eco Park.

Mother Tortoise was coming to visit the butterflies at Eco Tourism Park. The Striped Tigers, the Common Crows and the Great Egflies were flapping about as usual in the shrubs but their keepers were all aflutter since morning. Not everyday does Lee Durrell, director of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and the widow of conservation icon and author Gerald Durrell, come visiting.

The lady, credited with successful captive breeding of various endangered species including the ploughshare tortoise of Madagascar (to which she owes her sobriquet), was on a visit to the land of her late husband's birth and the New Town trip had been woven into her packed schedule.



Striped Tiger



Blue Tiger



Great Egfly

Some of the species that she released.
Pictures by Sudeshna Banerjee

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TISH AIRWAYS



lin Stevenson and local conservation activist Basav
to Gate 6 of Eco Park around 10.30am but her first meeting at
the butterfly park, was to be a virtual one with snakes, crocs and

dhuri started off by giving her an audio-visual presentation on
ts at Assam State Zoo.

or reptile breeding. When we reached, a clutch of Indian rat
Ve showed them how to incubate them artificially. For the first
hatched and were released in their natural habitat."

ared was the artificial incubation of salt water crocodiles that
n at Bhagabatpur in the Sunderbans. The eggs-to-hatchling
nception in 1976 was barely 40 per cent. "Despite the lack of
ation chamber on the island, we managed to increase the rate
bout 70 of the young were tagged and released in the waters."

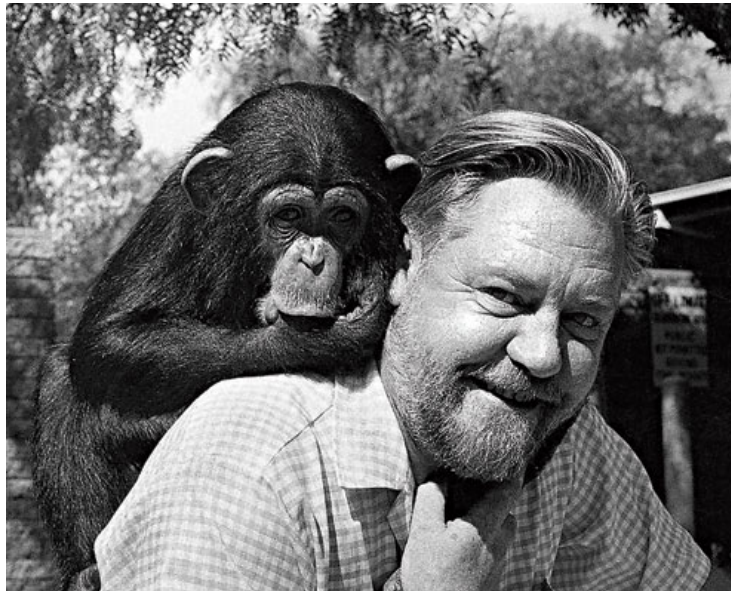
en successful. Bengal, he pointed out, lags in turtle
angered species have their natural habitat here, like the Indian
netimes get rescued. But we know too little about their status or
turtle breeding," he said, seeking tips from Durrell.

f Nature Mates who runs the butterfly park at Central Park in
his choice of butterflies for conservation. "If the base is strong
ened. If the tiger has to be conserved one should start with the
10,000 butterflies in nature every year," he said, taking Durrell
erflies were being incubated from egg to larva to pupa stage.
urrell.

that the small creatures are the nuts and bolts of the eco
attention to them. They are only interested in the box office

to see the detailed records being kept. "We can give you
se data of the release," said Basu Roy. "What about mortality
ve that both at egg and pupa stage as also the total emergence
ay also assured her that they were computerising the data and
eafing through the data records, she said: "Your desire to

record is much a Gerry thing. He used to insist that the staff write everything down even in
the 60s when documentation of data was unheard of. Young people now have no clue
about natural history. How many eggs should a bird hatch and when, what is the average
— our generation knew all these things by going into the forest and checking. We have to
get the youth out there."



"Gerry (Gerald) always said that the small creatures are the nuts and bolts of the eco system. But people
pay little attention to them. They are only interested in the box office animals"

She would soon be going out there herself, guided by the park's lepidopterist Sarika
Baidya and Basu Roy. The domed enclosure is shaded by a net which reduces the sunlight
by 30 per cent. Inside, Durrell was handed a basket full of butterflies to release. While
some fluttered away on their own, others had to be coaxed out. A few settled on her
fingertips and would not leave till she blew at them.

She was quite taken with the system of rotten fruits being hung in netted bags in the
enclosure. "Some butterflies need fruit sap as nutrient," Basu Roy explained. "Colin, please
take a picture of this," Durrell urged Stevenson who was clicking away.



With Arjan Basu Roy



Being shown around



On receiving a Nature Mates life membership. (Sudeshna Banerjee)

There were many more in various hues and stripes outside when she did a walk-through amid the lime and lantana, rangan and karabi plants that butterflies love. "If we create a habitat keeping the basic needs of the butterfly in mind, like source of nectar, availability of larval host plant and proper roosting places, then slowly but steadily the butterfly population becomes residential. Thus they are confined here without confinement," Basu Roy explained to her.

"It's brilliant. Wish there were more centres like this," Durrell gushed to The Telegraph Salt Lake on her way out. "They are planning a butterfly park in Jersey Zoo (run by the trust). She was impressed that we had made such a vibrant garden using such simple means," smiled Basu Roy.

- Visit the butterfly park as soon as Eco Park opens. Butterflies are hard to come by after 3pm

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