

“Rainforest: The Most Precious Environment on Earth” (Transcript)

From <http://www.learnaboutbutterflies.com/Rainforests.htm>

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It is 6:00 a.m., and we are awoken by the raucous echoing call of a troop of howler monkeys. They are perhaps two kilometers away, but the sound fills the forest around us. Dawn is breaking as we venture along a trail through the primary rainforest. Mysterious butterflies flit around us. I spot where they have settled, but their amazing camouflage makes them almost impossible to locate. Some, like *Taygetis angulosa* look exactly like dead leaves. Others like *Haetera piera*, *Cithaerias pireta* and *Ithomia agnosia* are almost entirely transparent. Enormous Caligo owl butterflies flit from one tree trunk to another. Their wings have a feathery appearance and are marked with false “owl eyes,” enough to startle any predatory bird and give the butterfly a chance to escape.

STOP AND TALK:

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What have you learned about the way some butterflies defend themselves against enemies?

On your C/F/Q/R note-catcher, record your note in the “FACTS” column. Then in the “CATEGORY” column, write which category this fact belongs in.

Every butterfly species here has its own distinct personality. The zebra-striped *Colobura dirce* sits motionless on tree trunks as it feeds at sap runs, but if disturbed, instead of taking flight it scuttles around to hide on the opposite side of the tree. The striped hairstreak *Arawacus separata* sits facing sideways on a leaf, but as soon as you get within a meter, it rotates to show you its posterior! Like many other butterflies it seems to take delight in taunting human observers, but its odd behavior is simply a survival strategy—by rotating it narrows its profile and is much harder for a predator to spot. Butterflies use many strategies to hide themselves from predators, some use camouflage or disguise, others such as the *Eurybia Riordinids*, and the Nascus skippers, hide under leaves, darting out periodically to investigate intruders before disappearing again beneath another nearby leaf.

STOP, TALK, and WRITE:

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What new information have you learned about the way some butterflies defend themselves against enemies?

Record your note in your C/F/Q/R note-catcher, and text code it for the category it belongs in.

We come to a small glade, the site of a peccary mud wallow. Hundreds of butterflies are swarming around us—gorgeous black and yellow swallowtails, brilliant red and black Callicores, bright orange Julias, and Morphos—dazzling metallic blue butterflies the size of saucers. The muddy ground in the glade is carpeted with butterflies, which settle to imbibing the mineral-rich moisture. Male butterflies obtain vital chemicals this way, and pass them to females during copulation. There are myriads of butterflies here, and it is impossible to walk without treading on them. Amongst them are glittering green *Caria Metalmarks*, red *Marpesia Daggerwings* and the stunning Blue Doctor *Rhetus perianther*. At the edge of the glade we watch a Starry Night *Hamadryas velutina* basking head-downwards on a tree trunk. It is possibly the most beautiful butterfly we have seen today, with large velvety black wings adorned with hundreds of shimmering blue spots.

STOP, TALK, AND WRITE:

What is the main idea of this paragraph?

What new information have you learned about what some butterflies eat?

On your C/F/Q/R note-catcher, record your note in the “FACTS” column. Then in the “CATEGORY” column, write which category this fact belongs in.

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11: 00 a.m.—It is hot now, and the forest resounds with the call of giant cicadas. The sound begins as a slow hesitant clicking, gradually accelerates to a rattle, then a hum, and escalates into a haunting siren wail which fills the air for a few moments before fading again into silence.

We have been here for six days, and seen almost 300 butterfly species, several of them previously unknown to science. Every step along the trails reveals exciting new finds—huge helicopter flies, strange hemipteran bugs, weird beetles, stick insects, and praying mantises.

STOP AND TALK:

How do you think the author is feeling? What words in the text support your opinion?

A little later we climb the canopy tower. As we ascend we notice that every layer in the forest has its own characteristic butterfly fauna—Pierella Lady Slippers and Taygetis Dead-leafs at ground level, Tiger-mimics at about 3 meters, Heliconius at 10 to 20 meters. Many species, particularly the hairstreaks and metalmarks spend their lives almost entirely in the tree tops, and rarely descend to ground level. After a tiring climb we finally arrive at the top of the tower. We spend a relaxing half hour watching red and green macaws, great egrets, snail kites, and oropendolas flying past. It’s difficult to drag ourselves away, as the view across the vast expanse of pristine rainforest is awe-inspiring, but it is time for lunch, so we descend to ground level and slowly wander back along the trails to our base. We are so distracted by the myriads of butterflies seen along the route that we arrive late, and are so busy talking about the marvels we have seen that we barely find time to eat.

STOP, TALK, AND WRITE:

Describe where the author goes in this paragraph.

What new information have you learned about where some butterflies live?

On your C/F/Q/R note-catcher, record your note in the “FACTS” column. Then in the “CATEGORY” column, write which category this fact belongs in.

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In the afternoon we travel upriver by dugout canoe. Amazon kingfishers swoop past, a harpy eagle hovers high in the sky above us. On a nearby rocky island we see a caiman basking, and along the riverbanks we see sun bitterns and the beautiful capped heron. Strings of bright yellow Eurema and Phoebis butterflies fly in follow-the-leader fashion along the river’s edge. Hundreds gather to imbibe moisture on the sandbanks, erupting into flight as our boat passes. We notice how most butterflies congregate with others of their own species—there are clusters of Marpesia Daggerwings, groups of Heraclides Swallowtails, tightly packed clusters of Protesilaus Swordtails, and gatherings of bright orange Julias. Many different species arrive and depart throughout the day until late afternoon when a swirling swarm of migrating Eunica Purplewings ousts every other species.

STOP, TALK, AND WRITE:

What animals other than butterflies does the author write about in this paragraph?

What new information have you learned about what some butterflies do?

On your C/F/Q/R note-catcher, record your note in the “FACTS” column. Then in the “CATEGORY” column, write which category this fact belongs in.

We stop at various places along the river to explore the trails. Imaginary snakes wait to strike from behind every tree. But they are not all imaginary. Clambering up a riverbank we suddenly find ourselves confronted by an enormous anaconda with a massive head and a body eight meters in length! Luckily for us it has already eaten—its belly greatly distended by the capybara which became its breakfast!

As the day cools down, we journey back along the river. Beautiful birds fly across our path—green ibis, ringed kingfisher, striated heron, kiskadee, paradise jacamar. A giant river otter inquisitively pops its head out of the water next to the boat. A capybara, looking like an enormous guinea pig, looks across at us from the riverbank. During the next half hour we see a dozen tapirs, amongst the most enchanting and gentle of all animals, emerging from the forest at different spots along the riverbank. Back at our base the light is fading fast, and the howler monkeys roar again. We sit down for our evening meal, comparing notes about the wonders we have seen, and agree that this is probably the most wonderful place on Earth.

STOP AND TALK:

What kind of animal is an anaconda? How do you know from the text what kind of animal it is?