

Career Corner

Wildlife researcher: Jan Meerman



When Jan Meerman was a university research assistant in his native Netherlands, he found himself raising and feeding an assortment of moths as part of a study called the European Invertebrate Survey. (Invertebrates are animals without backbones, like insects, the octopus, etc.). The moths presented a problem on

Ameritech's Butterflies! Living Jewels of the Mundo MayaSM. The exhibit, housed in the Otto Borchert Family Special Exhibits Building, will have "ruins" of a Mayan temple in Belize, a waterfall, and a rain forest full of live tropical butterflies.

Jan Meerman says that butterflies and moths depend on specific plants to survive. So, to study butterflies, he also has to study flowers and plants. He has become an expert on both butterflies and plants in Belize. He is writing a field guide to the butterflies of Belize and the Yucatan.

When Jan Meerman went to college, he earned degrees in biology and ecology. Today he has his own business doing research and doing reports on the environment in various areas of Belize. He is an adviser to the Zoological Society and its partner, the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Inc. The Foundation bought land in Belize to use as a study site and nature preserve. Jan Meerman is doing a biological study of the plants and animals that live on that land, known as the Runaway Creek Work.

the weekends, when Meerman would visit his girlfriend Tineke, who lived a long way from the university.

There were a dozen or so moths which needed to be HAND-fed with sugar water once a day," he recalls. So he brought them with him. One weekend he left the moths at Tineke's apartment by mistake. "So for a whole week, Tineke dutifully fed the little moths and they did well. Nothing could go wrong with our relationship after that."

Indeed, Jan and Tineke eventually married. Now Tineke does much of the work on the Green Hills Butterfly Ranch and Botanical Collections that Jan and she own in Belize. If you don't know where Belize is, it's a small Central American country that borders on Mexico (see map). The Belize butterfly ranch will provide the butterflies for a major exhibit opening June 17 at the Milwaukee County Zoo. It is called



If you are interested in bugs, you could have a career in entomology (the study of insects). You can earn a degree in entomology at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. What kind of job could you get? You could do research on bugs at a university. Or you might work for a state agency such as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which is fighting an invasion of gypsy

moths that are eating trees. You also could work for a zoo, museum or nature group. Pest-control companies and businesses such as honey farms also hire people with either a four-year college degree or a two-year degree from a vocational school or technical college.

If the insects you want to study are butterflies and moths, you could become a lepidopterist. The first thing to learn is the life cycle of these insects: The adult butterfly lays an egg, which develops into a larva (a caterpillar), which eats until it goes into the pupa stage. Inside the rounded pupa, the butterfly develops and finally emerges.

