

FEATURES



Friendly postman



The morpho or emperor butterfly.

Our fascinating forest butterflies

THE FORESTS of Trinidad and Tobago are a paradise for lovers of the outdoors.

The soothing greens and browns mixed with a splash of colour from a forest flower; an unseen bird calls from the canopy, while stream frogs signal to you that water is nearby. And just then, a bolt of electric blue passes by. What was it? A forest butterfly of course!

Our forests are home to many species of butterflies, many of which are usually found in shady, well-vegetated areas including, but not limited to, the forest

undergrowth and along forest trails. Some species may also be attracted to gardens if a similar moist and shady habitat is available.

While there are several species with similarly-coloured uppersides, that bolt of blue was probably a common morpho. The morpho is an iconic resident of shady forests and woodland. This is the butterfly frequently encountered on forest trails and roads as it flutters with iridescent blue wings and in a characteristic dipping motion. It is known locally as the "Emper-



THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

or" and it is the symbol of the Emperor Valley Zoo, so named because this species frequents the valley behind the zoo. It is not usually encountered at rest with its wings spread, instead it tends to keep them closed, displaying the cryptically camouflaged underside.

But there are many other forest butterflies which you may encounter in the bush.

Locally known as the mort-bleu, the giant owls (*Caligo* sp.) belong to a family of large butterflies (about the size of a morpho) that emerge at dusk in search of ripe fruit. Mort-bleus may also be encountered at rest during the day in the deep shade of forest undergrowth.

There are three similar species of giant owl butterfly found in Trinidad and Tobago. Widely distributed, they sometimes enter homes in the evening. The upper-side of these butterflies tends to be purple with dark edges. But the undersides are really remarkable as they are cryptically marked with large eyespots, hopefully scaring off any potential predators.

Looking for a friendlier butterfly? Commonly known as the postman, the erato long wing (*Heliconius erato*) is an attractive member of the Heliconiinae family.

It is common in suitable habitat and can sometimes be found in large numbers feeding at forest flowers. Reminiscent of the colours used by the UK postal service, they are identified

by their black wings which are crossed by a broad red band, and by the four red spots at the base of their wings on the underside. They are weak fliers and avoid windy areas, preferring to keep to the undergrowth and forest edge.

Members of the Heliconiinae family are some of the only species of butterflies known to "eat" pollen. Intentional or not, this behaviour provides the butterflies with amino acids that may extend their lifespan. (Note: There is another very similar species of postman which can be found in Trinidad. It is *H. melpomene* and it is easily identified by three red spots at the base of the wing on the underside.)

There are several smaller butterflies as well. The white lycid is a common member of the Lycaenidae family. It is usually encountered sitting on leaves in cool shady areas, or as it flies off, briefly exposing its white upperside.

The underside of its wings is beautifully striped with dark brown, white and orange.

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FEATURES



One of the giant owl butterflies.

Keep an eye out for the butterfly

BUTTERFLY from page 4B

Members of the Lycaenidae family are usually found resting on leaves in cool, moist areas, often rubbing their hind-wings together. This is believed to draw attention to the antenna-like projections on their lower wings, which superficially resemble antennae and thus presents a false head to would-be predators, in order to draw attention away from its real head. To complete the act, when threatened they often rotate slowly and present their false head to the perceived threat. Alternatively, the wing-rubbing may serve to disperse pheromones. Members of the Lycaenidae are almost always found with their wings held vertically and closed.

So the next time you head off into the bush, don't forget to keep an eye out for these special little animals. They, like all other members of the forest ecosystem, contribute to the resilience and diversity of the environment. They are also really interesting to study!

For those keen to learn more about our butterflies: the TTFNC, in collaboration with other Angostura, Asa Wright Nature Centre and UWI Zoology Museum, has recently produced a fold-out field guide to TT's butterflies, which is available in bookstores or through the club. For more info on our natural environment, contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@tfnfnc.org or visit our website at www.tfnfnc.org and our Facebook or YouTube pages.

CHECK YOUR DAILY **HOROSCOPE**



THANKSGIVING 3 DAY SALE



Roast Turkey with Gravy and Cranberry Sauce

See full recipe on Facebook

Ingredients:

- 110 lb Prestige turkey
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon crumbled sage leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon each salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup sherry or sweet red wine
- 10 cups cubed bread, lightly toasted
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup chicken stock

Stuffing:

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 onions, chopped
- 1 cup finely chopped celery
- 1 teaspoon each crumbled sage, thyme
- 3/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper

Gravy:

- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
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