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**Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium
Marks Ninth "ANT-iversary" With Spotlight on Giant Butterflies
Tuesday, June 13**

(New Orleans, La.) - Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium Marks Ninth "ANT-iversary" With Spotlight on Giant Butterflies

To help celebrate the 9th "ANT-iversary" of its opening on Tuesday, June 13, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium is putting the spotlight on one of the most prized jewels in its insect collection: a pair of rare Queen Alexandra's birdwings, the world's largest butterflies.

The 100-year-old butterfly specimens – a male and a female – have been on display at the Insectarium since the museum opened on June 13, 2008.

"This is a spectacular butterfly species because the female is massive in size and they are exceptionally rare," said Zack Lemann, Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium's Curator of Animal Collections. "Our Hall of Fame has so many amazing preserved insects from around the world that our pair of Queen Alexandra's birdwings is often overlooked. We want to make sure our guests know they're here and come by to see them."

The Insectarium is the largest free-standing museum dedicated to insects and their relatives in North America. Housed inside the historic U.S. Custom House, approximately 900,000 critters (many live) call it home.

Visitors can see and touch arthropods, shrink down to bug size to explore the world beneath the topsoil and even expand their gastronomic horizons by eating bugs in Bug Appetit.

Viewed inside their Hall of Fame gallery display case, the female Queen Alexandra's birdwings may appear drab in color, but they boast some impressive physical characteristics. For example, wingspans can grow to more than 9.5 inches, their bodies reach lengths of over 3 inches, and they can tip the scales at nearly half an ounce (an extraordinary weight for a butterfly).

The species (*Ornithoptera alexandrae*) is endangered and can be found only along a 60-square-miles stretch of coastal rainforest in Oro Province in eastern Papua New Guinea. Collection and sale of the species is strictly regulated by international agreement.

Audubon Nature Institute acquired the century-old specimens from the founder of the Montreal Insectarium, an ardent collector of insects. "We knew from the moment we received these extremely rare butterflies that we would showcase them at the Insectarium," Lemann said.

"These butterflies are so highly prized by collectors that, on the black market, a single specimen reportedly goes for \$8,500 to \$10,000. In the last 15 or so years, wildlife agents have arrested a few people, including two high profile cases, for attempts to sell Queen Alexandra's birdwings illegally."

During their roughly two-month lifespan, female Queen Alexandra's birdwings can lay more than 200 eggs. Like pipevine swallowtails, its kindred species native to the United States, the larvae of Queen Alexandra's birdwings feed on leaves that contain toxins that both the caterpillar and the butterfly can use to ward off would-be predators.

While collectors have contributed to the population decline, habitat destruction is the main threat to the species, with conversion of rain forests to palm oil plantations cited as a primary factor. A volcanic eruption in Papua New Guinea in the 1950s also destroyed a large area of their habitat.

The species was named by British naturalist Walter Rothschild in 1907 in honor of Alexandra of Denmark, then the queen of the United Kingdom.

Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium Facts:

- Audubon Butterfly Garden and Insectarium opened on June 13, 2008, as the largest free-standing museum dedicated to insects and their relatives in North America.
- Housed inside the historic U.S. Custom House, approximately 900,000 critters (many live) call it home.
- Visitors are delighted when they see and touch arthropods, or shrink down to bug size to explore the world beneath the topsoil.
- Guests can even expand their gastronomic horizons by eating bugs in Bug Appetit, or experience Awards Night, an animated, multi-sensory movie that honors the incredible feats and roles that insects play in our natural world.

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