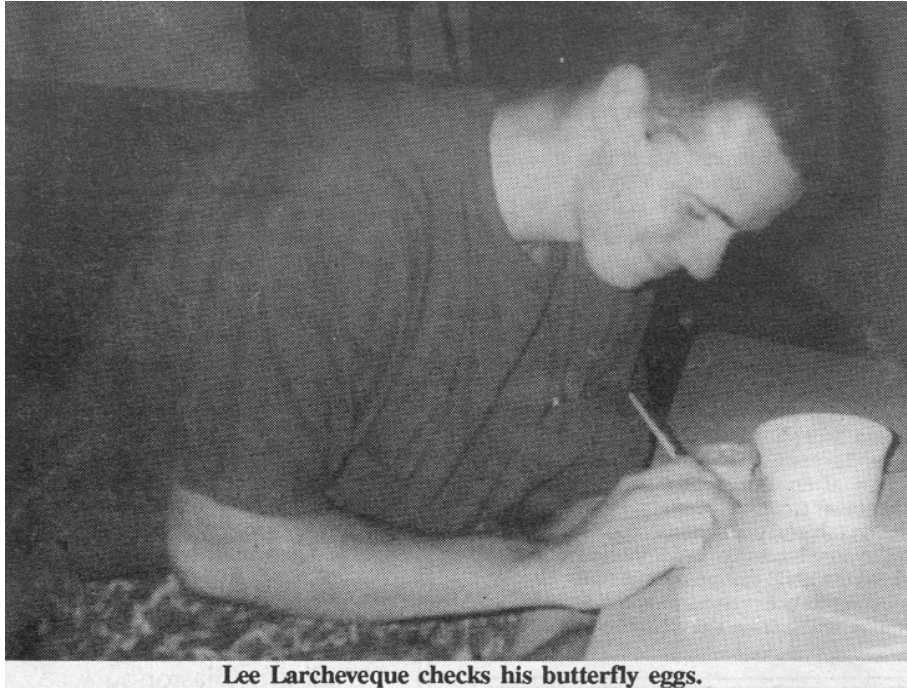


Butterfly Crusader Hopes to Reverse Insect's Decline

By Margaret R. LaCroix
Alcatraz had its bird man, and Glastonbury has a butterfly youth. He's Lee

Larcheveque. As Glastonbury's resident butterfly expert, he reports this year is a low point in the local monarch butterfly population.



Lee Larcheveque checks his butterfly eggs.

At 19, Larcheveque has been studying the butterfly for the past 12 years. "My sister gave me a monarch caterpillar when I was seven years old- She thought I would enjoy it. She didn't know what she was getting me into," he said.

And, what it turned into is an environmental crusade, as well as a business. At first he raised butterflies for the fun of it, but when he realized development is threatening the butterfly population, he became an advocate for its preservation.

"About five years ago I got some milkweed from the apple orchard near Foote Road. All my caterpillars died after eating the plants. I realized then that the insecticide used on the apple trees was killing the butterflies. It was a turning point for me. Before I raised them for fun, now I do it because I have to."

He explained that milkweed is the only food a monarch butterfly eats. Milkweed grows in fields and along roadways. Fields in Glastonbury are rapidly giving way to housing and commercial development and Larcheveque fears that as the milkweed disappears so will the butterfly.

Insecticides and development are not solely to blame for the decline in the butterfly population this year though. A storm this past winter in Mexico, where the butterflies go to be warm, wiped out large numbers and delayed their return to this area this past spring. There are about 300 million butterflies in the United States and the ones in the eastern sections come from Mexico.

The student reports usually finding eggs by the second week of June. This year he found only 11 eggs in two months, and only now is he finding more.

He finds the eggs underneath the leaves of

the milkweed. He raises them and sells the chrysalis to help finance his college studies. Since the eggs have to be checked four times a day, raising them means taking the eggs wherever he goes. This year he hopes to raise 500 butterflies.

The "Adopt A Monarch" business may even turn into his life's work. As a communications major at Syracuse University, he hopes to use his communication skills, along with his expert knowledge of butterflies, to develop teaching tools for teachers, especially those in third world countries. "Developing countries need education and educational, tools to help them preserve the environment."

Even now he presents lectures to local teachers about the butterfly, through the Holland Brook Nature Center. Last month he taught 13 teachers how to teach a butterfly unit. His lectures include mini-documentary videos that he produced himself.

Larcheveque will again be selling his butterfly chrysalises at his stand in front of Gardiner's Market in mid-August. He explained that some people have been regular customers over the years and have even given them as gifts to people all over the country. "That's what I like to hear because it means that they won't be flying back to the apple orchard and die."

The chrysalises are so beautiful, a soft green color with flecks of gold, that one lady actually thought he was selling jewelry. "When she finally stopped for a closer look she admitted she was sorry that she had passed me by for so many years. She said my work made her realize how ignorant she was about the butterfly. It's those converts that make it all worthwhile."

Larcheveque sells the chrysalises for \$5. Within 10 days you have a monarch butterfly as well as the thrill of watching it hatch. To buy a chrysalis you can also call Larcheveque at 413-549-6677