

A day with Göran

Nestled in the countryside outside Gävle, at the end of a winding road framed by dense forest, stands a yellow house brimming with stories of passion and curiosity. It belongs to Göran, Sweden's most accomplished butterfly collector. Over the years, his fascination with lepidopterans has grown so immense that he acquired an additional house behind his garden just to store his collection. What started as a small boy's interest in nature has blossomed into a lifelong dedication, earning Göran international recognition among butterfly enthusiasts and scientists alike.



Figure 1 - Göran's main house

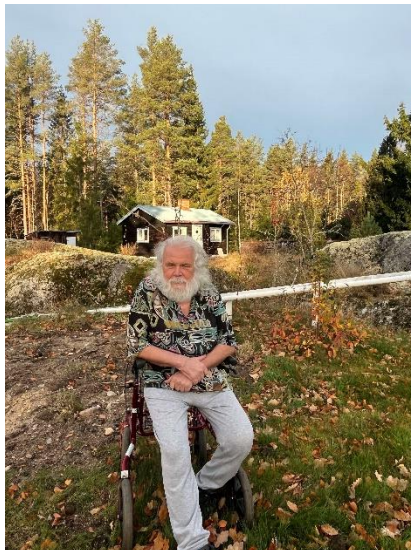


Figure 2- He even had to buy another cabin to store all his collection!

Göran's journey into the world of butterflies began at age 15, when a school friend, Clas Källander, introduced him to these delicate creatures. Before butterflies, Göran's interests had shifted between

orchids and birds, but butterflies captured his imagination in a way nothing else had. The allure of their beauty, diversity, and mystery became his lifelong pursuit. Every evening after work, he immersed himself in the study of butterflies, reading books, organizing specimens, and expanding his ever-growing collection.

"I'm glad my job wasn't about butterflies," Göran remarked. "This way, I had the freedom to explore the vast diversity of species without being confined to a single focus like researchers are." Today, his collection spans over 20,000 species from every corner of the globe, including rare and extinct specimens such as *Eurytides iphita* from Brazil that and the massive *Thysania agrippina*, the world's largest moth. Each butterfly in his carefully crafted drawers tells a story of exploration, dedication, and the fragile beauty of our natural world.

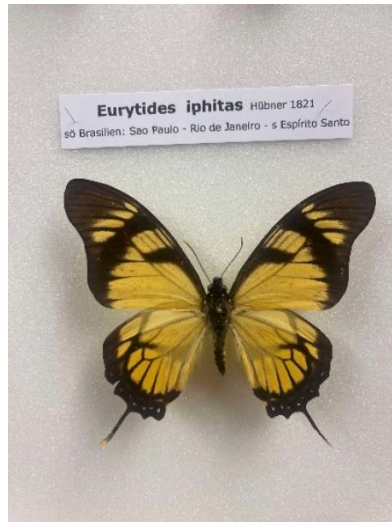


Figure 3 - Some of his species are extinct in the wild.



Figure 4 - Göran holds a the biggest Noctuid in the world, that was also featured in Maria Sibylla Merian's famous illustrations, marveling at how she, as a 17th-century woman, ventured to study and document insect life cycles.



Figure 5- Just a small part of his extensive collection.

Preserving history through wings

Göran's collection is not just a testament to his passion but also a living archive of global biodiversity. Among his most cherished specimens are those connected to historic explorers like Alfred Russel Wallace and A.S. Meek. Göran holds Wallace, who co-published the theory of evolution with Darwin, in high esteem, calling him "the most fantastic scientist of them all."

Through collaborations with collectors and naturalists worldwide, Göran has acquired species of profound historical and ecological significance. One such example is *Colias ponteni*, a butterfly with a peculiar history spanning Sweden, Chile, and Hawaii. Unraveling its journey required meticulous research, including DNA analysis of its pupae. Stories like these highlight the scientific value of Göran's work, even though he considers himself an amateur. "Amateurs have the freedom to explore broadly, while professionals often lack the time to dive into areas outside their specific research," he reflected.



Figure 6 - Göran proudly displays his collection of *Papilio dardanus*. In this species, males are yellow, while females mimic the appearance of a poisonous butterfly that exists in the area to deter predators. Remarkably, female *P. dardanus* exhibit varied pattern

From Gävle to the world

Despite his expansive collection, Göran remains grounded in his Swedish roots. His museum reflects not only his global reach but also his local impact. He was among the first to recognize the ecological importance of power lines as habitats for butterflies and wildflowers. His observations and advocacy saved critical areas from being disrupted by development projects, such as when he discovered the rare *Euphydryas aurinia* along a proposed railway route, successfully halting construction in that area.

The museum Göran has built is a labor of love, housing treasures like the Goliath birdwing butterflies and specimens from remote islands, each with its own evolutionary quirks. For Göran, the collection is not about monetary value—although it is worth millions of Swedish crowns—but about the joy of discovery and the stories behind each specimen. After his passing, the entire collection will be donated to Uppsala's Museum of Evolution, ensuring its preservation for future generations.

The digital future

Göran's vision extends beyond his physical collection. With the support of modern technology, he is digitizing his work, making it accessible to enthusiasts and researchers worldwide. "It's much easier to browse online than to open drawer after drawer," he said, gesturing toward his meticulously organized cabinets.

As he walked me through his museum, Göran's eyes sparkled with pride and nostalgia. He spoke of his adventures collecting butterflies in Africa, his friendships with international collectors, and his

dedication to understanding the ecological and historical context of each specimen. His work embodies not just the art of collection but also a profound respect for nature and history.

Göran's life is a reminder of the power of curiosity and passion. Through his butterflies, he has connected with people and places around the globe, leaving a legacy of beauty, knowledge, and conservation.

Isabel Resende, October 23, 2024.