



Butterfly People: An American Encounter with the Beauty of the World

William R. Leach

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With 32 pages of full-color inserts and black-and-white illustrations throughout.

From one of our most highly regarded historians, here is an original and engrossing chronicle of nineteenth-century America's infatuation with butterflies, and the story of the naturalists who unveiled the mysteries of their existence.

A product of William Leach's lifelong love of butterflies, this engaging and elegantly illustrated history shows how Americans from all walks of life passionately pursued butterflies, and how through their discoveries and observations they transformed the character of natural history. Leach focuses on the correspondence and scientific writings of half a dozen pioneering lepidopterists who traveled across the country and throughout the world, collecting and studying unknown and exotic species. In a book as full of life as the subjects themselves and foregrounding a collecting culture now on the brink of vanishing, Leach reveals how the beauty of butterflies led Americans into a deeper understanding of the natural world. He shows, too, that the country's enthusiasm for butterflies occurred at the very moment that another form of beauty—the technological and industrial objects being displayed at world's fairs and commercial shows—was emerging, and that Americans' attraction to this new beauty would eventually, and at great cost, take precedence over nature in general and butterflies in particular.



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