

TED Blog

09 August 2012

What happens when prisoners breed endangered butterflies



An endangered species of butterfly has found an unusual set of champions — the inmates of the Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Washington.

While the number of Taylor's checkerspot butterflies has dwindled in Washington in recent years, the Mission Creek inmates are working hard to help the species rebound, [reports the *Nature* magazine blog](#). By breeding the butterflies in a greenhouse outside the prison, the inmates released more than 800 butterflies into the wild this year, while other local prison groups pitched in efforts to conserve the plants that these butterflies prefer to lay their eggs on. So far, the Mission Creek inmates have raised more than 3,600 caterpillars for next year's release.

The Taylor's checkerspot butterfly revival is a part of the Sustainability in Prisons Project, the creation of frequent TED speaker Nalini Nadkarni. After the jump, check out Nalini's powerful TEDTalks, on researching animals that thrive in rainforest canopies and on bringing appreciation of nature into prisons.

[Nalini Nadkarni: On conserving the canopy](#)

In this talk from TED2009, Nalini describes the unique ecosystem of plants, birds and monkeys that thrives in the treetops of the rainforest. She explains how she's working to preserve these species through dance, art and bold partnerships.

[Nalini Nadkarni: Life science in prisons](#)

Yes — prisoners are confined behind bars, says Nalini Nadkarni in this talk from TED2010. But while they don't get to experience nature firsthand, they still can enjoy thinking about the natural world. Here, Nalini explains her efforts to bring science lectures into prisons in the state of Washington.

The Sustainability in Prisons Project has impressive statistics so far. According to the [Nature magazine blog](#), of the 238 prisoners who attended a single lecture and were later released, only 2 returned to prison within a year — a very, very low rate.

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