

## Monarch Migration

No doubt you have noticed the large number of monarch butterflies, *Danaus plexippus*, flying through the area during the past weeks. They even might pause briefly to sample the flowers in your garden. However, they don't stay for long as they are on a mission. It is early fall and these gorgeous orange and black creatures are flying from as far as southern Canada to their destinations in the mountains of central Mexico. There they will overwinter and prepare for their trek north in spring 2021 to begin a new breeding season. Some of them will migrate as far as 3,000 miles.

The monarchs that you see now are the great-great-grandchildren of those that returned from Mexico last spring. This fourth generation is the most numerous in population and the largest in physical size. As many as 500,000 make the journey, following the sun but also relying on an onboard magnetic compass on cloudy days. A special gene provides their muscles with the efficiency required for their arduous, long-distance flight.

Monarchs follow certain routes during their fall migration. In Ohio, they typically stop in Northeast Ohio to rest after their flight from Canada. Popular roosts in the Cleveland area are along Lake Erie, where thousands of southbound monarchs stop to rest and eat before continuing their journey. Closer to us, Darke County is a popular stopover for large numbers of these fall migrators.

Since the 1980s, monarch numbers overwintering in Mexico have fallen by 80 percent. Several factors are causing a decline in monarch numbers. One critical issue is the deforestation of their overwintering areas from the illegal timber trade in central Mexico. In Canada and the United States, monarchs rely exclusively on various species of milkweed as food for their developing

caterpillars. But the availability of milkweed is declining because of the use of herbicides and the eradication of their habitat from agricultural and roadside mowing. Climate change is a third factor that affects the ability of the monarchs to hibernate.

There are several things you can do to help stem the alarming decline of monarchs.

- 1) Teach your children the value of protecting these precious insects by showing them how to raise and release monarchs. Get involved yourself. Raising, tagging, and releasing monarchs is a very rewarding experience. Monarch Watch is a notable organization that provides information about opportunities to work with monarchs. They also sell native species of milkweed at a very reasonable price. Their web site is

<https://www.monarchwatch.org/>

- 2) Include butterfly friendly in your garden and landscape.

[https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator.org/assets/generalFiles/MonarchWingsOhio\\_Garden\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.pollinator.org/pollinator.org/assets/generalFiles/MonarchWingsOhio_Garden_FINAL.pdf)

For more information: <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/ent-82>

<http://www.littlemiami.com/Butterfly%20Gardens%20OSU%20Extension%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

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