

Natural. Valued. Protected.

Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)

The Monarch is a showy orange and black butterfly with small white spots. These butterflies are relatively large with a wingspan reaching 93-105 millimetres. The Monarch's caterpillar is easily recognized: It has black, white and yellow stripes and can be found feeding on milkweed plants. After their feeding and growth stage, the Monarch caterpillar moults into a striking jade-coloured chrysalis with golden spots.



Did you know?

In the fall, Monarchs travel up to 3,000 kilometres between breeding grounds in eastern North America and overwintering sites in central Mexico. Some Monarchs can travel an astonishing 80 kilometres in a single day!

Photo credit: Rick Stankiewicz

Habitat

Throughout their life cycle, Monarchs use three different types of habitat. Only the caterpillars feed on milkweed plants and are confined to meadows and open areas where milkweed grows. Adult butterflies can be found in more diverse habitats where they feed on nectar from a variety of wildflowers. Monarchs spend the winter in Oyamel Fir forests found in central Mexico.

Range

The Monarch's range extends from Central America to southern Canada. In Canada, Monarchs are most abundant in southern Ontario and Quebec where milkweed plants and breeding habitat are widespread. During late summer and fall, Monarchs from Ontario migrate to central Mexico where they spend the winter months. During migration, groups of Monarchs numbering in the thousands can be seen along the north shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.

Threats

The largest threat to Ontario Monarchs is habitat loss and fragmentation at overwintering sites in central Mexico where forests are being logged and converted into agricultural fields and pastures. Widespread pesticide and herbicide use throughout the Monarch's range may also limit recovery.

Protection

The Monarch is a special concern species under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*.

For more information on legislation that helps protect Ontario's species at risk visit ontario.ca/speciesatrisk.

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Provincial Status: Special Concern

What You Can Do to Help the Monarch

- The Ministry of Natural Resources tracks species at risk such as the Monarch. You can use an online form to report your sightings to the Natural Heritage Information Centre. Photographs with specific locations or mapping coordinates are always helpful! nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca
- Volunteer with your local nature club, stewardship council or provincial park to participate in surveys or stewardship work focused on species at risk. www.ontariostewardship.org
- There is a program geared to eligible farms registered under the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan to encourage greater protection and conservation of habitat for species at risk. For more information, visit: www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/efp/efp.htm.
- Populations of many insects that pollinate plants are declining around the world. For information on how you can easily give insect pollinators a helping hand visit: www.seeds.ca/proj/poll.
- Journey North is an online project that tracks the migration of Monarchs. Classrooms can participate by sharing their sightings at: www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch.
- Pesticides can be harmful to Monarch habitat. To learn how to keep your lawn and garden healthy and green without using pesticides visit: www.additupontario.ca/en/toxics/gardens.

Did you know?

Although most adult Monarchs only live for about four to five weeks, individuals that metamorphose into butterflies during autumn can live for seven to eight months. It is this generation that migrates south for the Canadian winter.

The Monarchs that travel from eastern North America to Mexico are not the same ones that return the following spring. As they leave the winter sites in Mexico, these older butterflies lay eggs in the southern United States. The descendents of that generation are the ones that fly north to Canada.

There is a toxin in milkweed plants that Monarch caterpillars are able to store in their bodies as they feed. The toxin stays in their system and makes the adults poisonous to bird predators.

Another species of butterfly, the Viceroy, looks very similar to the Monarch. The Viceroy doesn't eat milkweed, but most predators avoid the Viceroy, since it is easily confused with the toxic Monarch. In fact, there is evidence that the Viceroy may also be toxic because of a substance their caterpillars eat from willow leaves. Some predators may avoid the Monarch because it looks too much like a toxic Viceroy!

For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at ontario.ca/speciesatrisk
Contact your MNR district office
Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre
1-800-667-1940
TTY 1-866-686-6072
mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca
ontario.ca/mnr