



**SIERRA  
CLUB**

**IOWA CHAPTER**

## What you can do for Monarch butterflies . . .

Once found across Iowa each spring, summer and fall, the Monarch butterfly has experienced a 90 percent decline in its population. In the 1990's an estimated one billion Monarch butterflies migrated from Canada and the northern plains of the United States to wintering grounds in Mexico; an additional million Monarchs overwintered in California. In the winter of 2013 to 2014, an estimated 33 million Monarchs overwintered in Mexico; while the overwintering population in California was half of its 1990's population.<sup>1</sup>



An adult Monarch butterfly eating nectar in aster flowers.

Conservation efforts have improved the population since then; however the population counts remain low.

Obviously the population is facing serious challenges and its existence is imperiled. Reasons for the decline include the loss of milkweed which the Monarchs need for laying eggs and for food, logging at its overwintering sites in Mexico, and extreme weather and climate change.

### **Iowa is a crucial part of the Monarch life cycle that stretches from Canada to Mexico.**

The Monarchs from the eastern United States, including Iowa, overwinter in Mexico, northwest of Mexico City. They live in dense clusters in trees in the forests.

In March - those Monarchs fly north. When they reach areas populated with milkweed in northern Mexico and the southern United States, in April to early May, they mate and lay eggs.

The adults from these eggs emerge in late April to early June. They form the first generation of



A caterpillar on a milkweed seed pod.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarina Jepsen, Dale F. Schweitzer, Bruce Young, Nicole Sears, Margaret Ormes, Scot Hoffman Black, Conservation Status and Ecology of the Monarch Butterfly in the United States, March 2015, Page 1

Monarchs. The adults begin traveling north, laying eggs along the way, throughout the United States and into Canada.

The adults that form the second generation of Monarchs emerge in June and July. Most of these adults will stay relatively close to where they emerged and do not migrate large distances.

A third generation of eggs are laid from late May through July. Some of the third generation Monarchs do not reproduce, instead are part of the migration to Mexico.

Finally a fourth generation of eggs are laid in late June through August. The fourth generation does not lay eggs. The fourth generation migrates to Mexico to overwinter.

The Monarch butterfly metamorphosis from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to adult in approximately 30 days, but the first generation may require 10 to 20 more days to reach adulthood. The eggs are laid on milkweed leaves. The caterpillar eats the milkweed. Adults feed on the nectar from a large variety of plants.



Common milkweed, a favorite of Monarch butterflies.

The adult Monarchs live from two to six weeks in the summer. Those Monarchs that migrate to wintering grounds live from six to nine months.

### **You can help protect the Monarch butterflies.**

In order for the Monarch butterflies to maintain and expand their population, we will have to help them. Things you can do include:

- Raising milkweed in your garden. There are many varieties of milkweed native to Iowa. The common milkweed is a favorite of the Monarchs.
- Planting a variety of native plants in your yard and garden. The Monarchs need nectar throughout the spring, summer, and fall.
- Reducing or eliminating the spraying of herbicides and insecticides on your property.
- Advocating for your County Engineer to have milkweed planted by the secondary road crew as part of your county's Roadside Vegetation Management plan.



An adult Monarch butterfly and common milkweed.  
Photo by Laura McCormack

## **Monarch butterflies need your help!**