

Monarch Conservation

Over the last decade, scientists have seen dramatic drops in the eastern Monarch population. Many different factors, including habitat loss and extreme weather have impacted the Monarch population. Currently, Canada, the United States and Mexico are working together to protect this amazing natural phenomena.

What is the park doing to help?

Point Pelee National Park is actively restoring savannah habitat – home to the Monarch butterfly. Most of the park's savannah habitat disappeared over the years due to succession and park staff are actively opening these areas up, planting native species, including several different species of milkweed and nectaring plants, and maintaining these open habitats for the future.



What can you do to help?

- Plant a butterfly garden with native plants. Look for species that flower into the fall to provide nectar for migrating butterflies and milkweed for monarch caterpillars.
- Become a citizen scientist and share your observations with organizations like Monarch Watch and Journey North/South

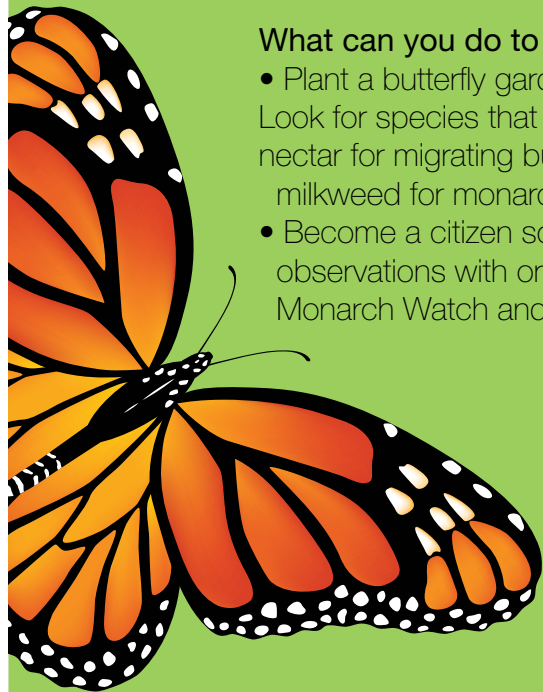


For more information:

North America Monarch Butterfly Conservation Plan (www.cec.org)

Monarch Watch (www.monarchwatch.org)

Journey North & South (www.learner.org/jnorth)



Point Pelee National Park
407 Monarch Lane
Leamington ON N8H 3V4
519-322-2365 pelee.info@pc.gc.ca

 www.facebook.com/PointPeleeNP

 www.twitter.com/PointPeleeNP

Monarch Butterflies

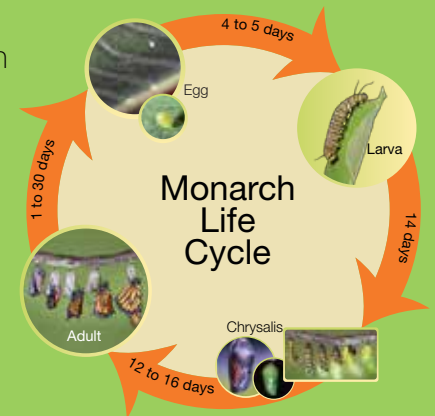
Monarch butterflies are one of the most recognizable species in Canada. While they have been spotted on almost every continent in the world and colonies have established in some tropical areas, the migratory population of North America is a unique natural phenomena.



Life Cycle of a Monarch

Life begins as a tiny egg laid on the leaf of a milkweed plant. It develops for 4-5 days before it hatches into a tiny caterpillar, so small it's hard to see with the naked eye. They spend about 2 weeks munching away on milkweed leaves growing from microscopic to 5 cm in length. The toxins in the milkweed plant are incorporated into the body of monarch caterpillar, and later the adult, making them taste terrible and preventing many predators, like birds, from eating them.

When large enough, the caterpillar will hang from a leaf in “j formation” and begin the magical process of becoming a chrysalis. In this stage, watch for the antennae to twist into a corkscrew – the skin will then split, revealing a writhing green mass which soon hardens to form a chrysalis. In 12-16 days, the outside of the chrysalis will change from green to clear and the butterfly will emerge shortly thereafter. After pumping fluid into the wings and drying, the adult will be ready to fly off and start the process all over again.



Most adult monarchs live for about a month, during which they will mate and lay eggs. One special generation lives for more than 6 months. Monarchs that emerge in late August and September don't have the urge to reproduce – instead, they have the urge to migrate. All energy is put into creating fat stores allowing the butterflies to make the incredible journey over 4000 kilometres to a mountainous forest in central Mexico. From late August to mid-October monarchs migrate south through Ontario. The Great Lakes act as a barrier and the butterflies choose the shortest points to cross the lakes, like Point Pelee. They tend to move on cold fronts and numbers of monarchs will only build when weather conditions (rain, wind or temperature) prevent them from crossing Lake Erie. Resting monarchs are best viewed at the Tip just before sunset or in the early morning – look for sheltered areas near the tops of trees. And remember, monarchs with closed wings look like dead leaves, so a pair of binoculars will come in handy.



Monarch Migration Calendar

When the days get shorter and the nights get cooler and the milkweed ages, monarch butterflies begin their 3000 mi (4828 km) southward migration.

Monarchs arrive at their destination and overwinter in the Trans Volcanic Mountains of central Mexico.

As winter ends, the days get longer and warmer. Monarchs once again become active and begin to mate.

These same monarchs then fly to the southern United States in search of milkweed to lay their eggs before dying.

The next generation needs a month to mature before continuing the journey north.

Typically there are 2-4 generations throughout the summer depending on weather conditions. Monarchs butterflies born in the summer live for 1 month, whereas migrating monarch butterflies born in the fall can live for up to 8 months!



Canada
United States
Mexico

Point Pelee National Park

Eastern Population
 Breeding: Primarily east of the Rocky Mountains
 Wintering: At 12 main sites in the Sierra Chincua Mountains of Central Mexico

Western Population
 Breeding: Primarily west of the Rocky Mountains
 Wintering: At 300 small sites spread over 600 miles (965 km) along the Pacific Coast.

Rocky Mountains
 Migration flyway

For centuries there have been stories about migrating monarchs, but until 1975, no one put all the pieces of the puzzle together to determine where the butterflies were going. Dr. Fred Urquhart (University of Toronto) and Norah Urquhart began tagging monarch butterflies. As the tags were returned, they were able to map the route the butterflies took, leading them to the cool mountains in central Mexico. They discovered large roosts of millions of butterflies – so many that the branches of the evergreen trees would bough under their weight. These roosts house all of the migratory monarchs east of the Rockies; a similar location on the Baja Peninsula is the overwintering ground for the western population.

Continued study shows the butterflies rest on the trees most of the time, flying and feeding only on the warmest days. As the days grow longer through the winter, they become more active and by March start the journey north, mating and laying eggs along the way. Their offspring will arrive in Point Pelee in late spring, to start the process all over again.