

News Bulletin

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March 9, 2018

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Idaho-reared monarch butterfly completes multi-state flight to California

BOISE, Idaho – A winged invertebrate reared in Idaho’s Treasure Valley made history when it was rescued from a swimming pool by a California homeowner. The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) had flown all the way from Idaho to overwinter along the California Coast.

Biologists studying the movements of monarchs documented a first for the declining species March 2 in a swimming pool of a resident who welcomed the visitor’s historic landing. The homeowner found the butterfly a few hundred yards from a known overwintering site where the female butterfly likely spent the winter. While monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains are typically regarded as belonging to the western population, this is the first documented case of a tagged Idaho monarch making the journey to California since Washington State University began a tagging program in 2012.

Reared in Idaho by a monarch butterfly enthusiast, B1861, affectionately known as Monet, departed Idaho in September. She flew approximately 662 miles southwest on a skyward journey across Nevada and into southern California before settling in the greater Santa Barbara area, an overwintering site for many monarch butterflies of the western population. The homeowner rescued and then released the butterfly, which apparently was none the worse for her near-death-by-drowning experience.

“This is big news. Monet is the first Idaho monarch in my study to be recovered in California, and at six months of age she is the longest-lived monarch documented in this Washington State University tagging effort” said [Dr. David G. James](#), an associate professor at WSU specializing in invertebrate conservation. “Monet will go down in Idaho monarch history, that’s for sure.”

Monet was the name that Melinda Lowe bestowed on the caterpillar she began rearing August 14, 2017 in her Idaho home.

“I had a specially-built butterfly cage constructed for her where she grew fat and happy eating freshly-picked showy milkweed leaves,” said Lowe.

Fast forward a few weeks and Monet emerged from her chrysalis and became a California-bound butterfly that Lowe released that evening.

“She immediately flew up and out of the yard and toward the west. I flapped my hand waving goodbye. Such a bittersweet moment,” Lowe said.

Six months later, Dr. James informed Lowe that Monet had turned up in a swimming pool more than 600 miles away.

“Hopefully, she is now heading inland from Goleta, California, with dry wings seeking milkweed to lay her eggs,” said Dr. James.

The monarch butterfly is a national priority species for the Service, and community-based projects in Idaho’s Treasure Valley and throughout the country are helping to enhance and restore habitat to benefit the monarch. This beautiful orange and black species is known for its remarkable annual, multi-generational migration between its over-wintering grounds in central Mexico and California, to its spring and summer breeding grounds in the northern and interior portions of the United States and Canada. This butterfly requires milkweed plants to reproduce, and female monarchs will only lay eggs on milkweeds. Native milkweeds are the primary food sources for monarch caterpillars.

Monarch butterflies and other pollinators are in trouble. The decline of these species may be attributed to habitat fragmentation, urban and agricultural development, pesticide use and lack of nectar plants for food. In the case of the migratory monarch, the lack of native milkweed is believed to be a critical limiting factor. The Service is working with our partners to help increase monarch populations by working with agricultural producers, transportation agencies, government agencies, and the public to create wildlife-friendly pollinator gardens and essential milkweed habitat for monarchs. Learn more about our efforts to save the monarch at <https://www.fws.gov/savethemonarch/>

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