

Monarch Butterfly Fact Sheet

Compiled from Monarchjointventure.org and Monarchwatch.org

Life History

- Much of the monarch butterfly's life is spent migrating between Canada, Mexico and the U.S., a journey that for some individuals can cover up to 3,000 miles.
- Monarch populations of eastern North America have declined 90%. Eastern monarchs migrate only to the Transvolcanic Mountains in Mexico, where the total area occupied by the overwintering butterflies fell from the 20-year average of 6.7 hectares to a record low of 0.67 hectares last winter. (Monarch populations are measured as the number of hectares of trees occupied by clustering butterflies in mid-December of each year).
- Monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains overwinter along the Pacific coastline of California and move inland in the spring to reproduce. These populations have declined 80% across many of California's overwintering sites.
- Most eastern monarchs joining the migration each fall are 3-4 generations removed from those that made the journey the previous year.
- Migratory monarchs that survive the winter in Mexico are 8-9 months of age and may be the longest lived of all butterflies. In contrast, reproductive monarchs breeding during the summer months only live 2-5 weeks due to the high cost of reproduction.
- During the breeding season monarchs require milkweed plants upon which to rear their larvae and nectar sources to sustain the adults during reproduction. Nectar sources are also required by the butterflies to fuel the fall migration as well as the spring flights northward. Overwintering monarchs require shelter and water.

Causes of Decline

- Loss of breeding habitat: The major summer breeding area is the grasslands of central North America, particularly the area known as the Corn Belt. Chemical-intensive agriculture, increasing acreage converted to row crops, and mowing/herbicide treatment of roadsides has contributed to a decline of milkweed, the only plant eaten by monarch caterpillars.
- Degradation of overwintering habitat - Overwintering monarchs depend on the protective cover of undisturbed oyamel fir forest canopy in Mexico. While the Mexican government has largely stopped the major illegal logging that threatened the forests used by the wintering monarch butterflies, damaging small scale illegal logging continues.

First Steps

- Recognizing that sustaining the monarch migration will require the cooperation of all three countries, President Obama reached an agreement with the President of Mexico and Prime Minister of Canada to ensure the conservation of the monarch butterfly.

- On June 20, 2014, President Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum, “Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,” outlining an expedited agenda to address the devastating declines in honey bees and native pollinators, including the monarch butterfly.
- Secretary Jewell tasked Director Ashe to convene an interagency High Level Working Group to develop and implement a U.S. strategy for monarch conservation. A Trinational Monarch Butterfly Conservation Action Plan to update the 2008 North American Monarch Conservation Plan will be delivered at the 2015 North American Leaders Summit early next year. The Federal Pollinator Strategy is due to the White House in mid-December 2014.
- Our agencies can play a substantial role in helping this flagship species. Government agencies and many non-governmental conservation and educational organizations in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada are committed to supporting monarchs. Additionally, there are many opportunities for the public to engage in monarch research via several citizen science programs. All of these efforts need additional support to further engage the public, schools, nature centers, municipalities and government agencies in efforts to create habitats for monarchs

