

Monarch Butterfly

Danaus plexippus

STATUS	Special Concern 	Not Listed 
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Species Description

Monarch butterflies are bright orange with heavy black veins and wide black borders containing two rows of white spots (10 cm wingspan). Larvae (caterpillars) are striped yellow, black, and white, and are 5 cm long. Its gold-green chrysalis (cocoon) typically hangs from a milkweed leaf or branch.



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Occurs throughout Maritimes and southern parts of Newfoundland. The eastern Monarch population ranges from Alberta to Newfoundland and south to Mexico, where it winters.



Habitat

Found wherever wildflowers flourish, such as open fields, meadows, and along roadsides. The presence of milkweed is key as monarchs only lay their eggs on its leaves. Wildflowers such as goldenrods and asters are important nectar sources. Adults migrate to Mexico in the fall and form dense congregations on forested mountaintops.



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Monarchs are typically observed in July and August in the habitat described above.

Interesting Points

- Known as the “storm king” because it is almost always most active just before a storm.
- Caterpillars eat milkweed, which makes them poisonous to birds.
- Thousands of individuals roost in the exact same trees every year along migration routes.
- No other known insect undergoes an annual, two-way, long distance, large-scale migration.
- It is a mystery how Monarchs correctly navigate to their overwintering grounds, since no migrants have made the journey before.



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Chrysalis



Swamp Milkweed

Similar Species

Viceroy:

Slightly smaller; inner margin of black on the hind wings; mimics the monarch's colouration but is not poisonous.



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Tiger Swallowtail:

Similar size; yellow with four black bands; blue on hind wings, with distinct “tail”.



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Threats to Survival

- Unfavourable weather (cold, harsh winters; hot, dry summers; storms during migration).
- Intentional removal of milkweed, which is known as a noxious weed.
- Increasing use of herbicides/insecticides.
- Loss of breeding and staging habitat in Canada and the USA.
- Logging, human disturbance and predation at wintering grounds in Mexico.

How You Can Help

Learn to recognize this species and report your first sighting each year to Journey North. Join the Butterfly Club and plant a butterfly garden with milkweed and wildflowers. Do not use insecticides and herbicides.



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Pesticide application



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Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: AC CDC (506) 364-2660

Info: www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca, www.monarchwatch.org

Sighting Reports: www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch

Stewardship: Butterfly Club www.facebook.com/MonarchButterflyClub