



MAJESTIC MONARCHS

DANAUS PLEXIPPUS

Monarch Migration

Coastal Delaware plays a crucial role in the annual migration of monarch butterflies. Each fall, monarchs gather in Cape May, New Jersey and cross the Delaware Bay, stopping along the Delaware coast to collect nectar needed for their long journey south.

Those that survive, over winter in oyamel fir trees in the mountains of central Mexico and experience a period of dormancy called diapause. In the spring, these monarchs begin their flight north, laying eggs in the southern United States. Their offspring move north, laying eggs as they travel. **Three to four generations of monarchs live in our area each summer before starting the migration cycle again.**

Helping Monarchs

Since the 1980s, the migrating eastern monarch butterfly population has declined an estimated 80%. Several factors affect monarch survival including habitat loss, widespread pesticide use, and the effects of climate change. Pollinator gardens like this add to natural nectar sources along the Delaware shore, supporting migrating monarchs. You too can help monarchs by planting native milkweed and flowering plants to provide food for caterpillars and nectar for adults.

Gently explore this monarch habitat, observe the monarch's behavior, and become inspired to help monarch butterflies in your own garden!

Monarchs migrate farther than any other species of butterfly in North America. While their typical lifespan lasts about six weeks, migrating monarchs can live up to nine months!

Life Cycle of the Monarch Butterfly

EGG

Female monarch butterflies lay one egg at a time on the underside of a milkweed leaf. She "tastes" the leaves with her feet, identifying a suitable milkweed leaf to lay each egg. In her lifetime she will lay about 400 eggs, but less than 1-2% will become an adult butterfly.



LARVA

The caterpillar (larva) hatches from the egg, eating the eggshell for its first meal. At this stage, it is barely visible and is most vulnerable to insect and bird predators. The caterpillar feeds on milkweed leaves, growing to 2,000 times its original mass. The caterpillar molts its exoskeleton four times as it grows, getting bigger and accumulating the milkweed's defensive toxins which protect it from predators.



PUPA

The caterpillar begins to wander in search of a secluded place to transform into a chrysalis (pupa). The caterpillar spins a pad of silk with its mouth, attaching its back feet to a secure surface and hangs upside down in a "J" shape. After a brief time, the caterpillar molts one last time, creating a beautiful green and gold chrysalis.



ADULT

During the next 8 to 15 days, a near complete cellular rearrangement occurs within the chrysalis. The caterpillar's body metamorphoses into a butterfly, with orange wings veined in black and dotted with white spots. The butterfly also gains a straw-like proboscis that it uses to drink nectar from flowering plants.





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