

MONARCH

Danaus plexippus



©Frank Aguilar



Range

Monarchs are the only butterflies known to make long distance migrations. They are members of a tropical family that cannot survive cold winters. North American monarchs migrate south in the fall to California, Mexico or Florida. On the way north in the spring they lay eggs. It's the young produced by those and the next generation's eggs that return all the way north and start south again.



Insects

MONARCH

Danaus plexippus



Appearance

Length: 12 inches

Wingspan: 3½-4 inches

Weight: 17/1000 of an ounce

Adult monarch butterflies are orange above with black veins and white spotted wing borders. Males have a black scent patch on a vein across the middle of the hind wing.

Behavior

Habit: Migratory, diurnal, nectar feeder

Diet: Adults feed on flower nectar. Caterpillars feed on plant leaves, preferring milkweeds and dogbanes.

Lifespan: Up to 10 months

Monarchs migrate north through Texas in March and April laying eggs on milkweed plants as they pass through. Most of the young produced will continue the journey north when mature. The fall migration of monarchs starts in September but peaks with the passing of cold fronts in October.

Habitat

Monarchs are found all over Texas, the U.S., southern Canada and Mexico to central America. There are also breeding populations in Hawaii and Australia. Monarchs occur wherever milkweeds grow.



Life Cycle

Sexual maturity: Monarchs are able to mate and reproduce within a week of leaving their **chrysalis**. A complete life cycle can take as little as 4 to 5 weeks.



Mating season: All year except winter.

Gestation: Eggs hatch in 7-10 days, caterpillar stage lasts about 3 weeks, chrysalis stage lasts about 7 days.

No. of young: Female monarchs can lay between 400 and 600 eggs.

Legend Has It ...

Monarchs enter Texas in the fall weighing 400 milligrams but leave weighing 650 milligrams. This 62.5% increase in weight is stored in the form of fat which the butterflies will use as an energy source during cold weather.

Monarchs & Man

Monarchs return by the tens or hundreds of thousands to the same groves of trees each winter. They are sluggish during the winter and feed only on warm days. Humans are trying to protect these important places by creating butterfly preserves. Researchers study monarch migration by tagging individual butterflies to see where, how far and how fast they travel. Schools can be involved in this effort by contacting:

Texas Monarch Watch
Nongame Program
Texas Parks & Wildlife
4200 Smith School Rd.
Austin, TX 78744

or by calling 1-800-792-1112.

Now You Know!

- › Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed plants.
- › Their caterpillars absorb the poisons produced by the plant and become poisonous themselves.
- › Birds that try to eat monarchs or their caterpillars throw up! They quickly learn that monarchs are not good to eat!
- › Other butterflies, such as Queens and Viceroy's, copy the colors of monarchs so that birds won't eat them either.