

Majestic crusade

We can do a little to improve the lot of monarchs

It is May, and the monarchs will be here soon.

They will be here later than usual after the harsh weather. They fly from central Mexico to the rest of the U.S., having had to fly through all of the bad weather we have endured this spring.

But they will be here - So let's help save the monarch butterfly.

This year we will likely lose forever the monarchs that stay west of the Rockies. From reports, there are now only 30,000 left after the last few years of overwintering in Southern California. That low number cannot sustain an entire species, according to the scientists.

So, sadly, these monarch will most likely be lost forever. They will go extinct like so many other species on our planet because of our selfishness.

We have an opportunity to do something to save our monarch population east of the Rockies.

If each of us were to plant a few milkweed plants in our gardens to feed the caterpillars and butterflies, as well as give the females the plants they need to lay their eggs, we would help them survive. We must rethink how we use pesticides and quit killing all the milkweed plants; they are not weeds. The entire life cycle of the monarch depends on this one plant.

Caterpillars eat nothing but milkweed leaves.

You can look up online which milkweed plants are native to your area. You will be surprised when the monarchs start showing up. Then you can watch them grow from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis then to the butterfly. It is quite remarkable. By doing this you will know that you helped save the species.

We also need to encourage the highway departments in our communities to stop mowing the milkweed plants down and stop spraying them; this also kills the plants to the root system and any eggs or caterpillars on them.

The monarchs start their migration north from the mountains of central Mexico. They begin their trip north around February; each female flies north, lays its eggs then dies. This will happen four or five times before we see them, so we are seeing the fourth or fifth generation of monarchs.

They spend the summer here and all other states east of the Rockies, eating the nectar from flowers and laying their eggs on the milkweed plants. The caterpillars eat the leaves until they are ready to go into chrysalis stage, where a miracle happens. The caterpillar turns to liquid and it rearranges itself into the majestic butterfly we know today. No one knows how this happens and this process may remain a great mystery, as it should be.

The fourth or fifth generation in our area is the super generation that makes the 2,500-mile migration back to the mountains of central Mexico to overwinter in one area smaller than 5 acres. It is an amazing journey these butterflies make, given how fragile they are. If we don't do something now, we will lose them forever in a few years just like those monarchs west of the Rockies.

I want future generations of kids to know what monarchs look like in real life, not just from pictures. Don't you? It would be such a loss to allow them to disappear from this earth forever. So will you help?

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