



A monarch caterpillar is easily distinguishable from other caterpillars in Saskatchewan by its white, yellow and black bands. Photo by Sharon Dowdy

A Royal Migration Is Set to Arrive in Saskatchewan

Carolyn Gaudet

The next four months are a great time to see monarch butterflies in Southern Saskatchewan. They reach the Prairies as early as late May to begin feeding and breeding, and may start migrating south as early as late July, depending on the weather patterns.

Monarchs are one of the most well-known butterflies in the world. They are large, showy butterflies with wingspans of seven to 11 centimetres. A monarch butterfly can be identified by its predominantly orange wings with black veins, and the white spots on the outside edges of its wings and on its black body.

A male monarch has two distinct black dots on its hindwing, which distinguishes it from a female. A monarch caterpillar (ranges in size from two to six centimetres as a newly-hatched caterpillar to a five-centimetre mature caterpillar), has white, yellow and black bands; making it easily distinguishable from other caterpillars in Saskatchewan.

Monarch habitat is limited to areas of native grasslands, ditches, etc., that have native flowers and milkweed species as monarchs are highly dependent on milkweed to complete their life cycle. Adults feed on the nectar of various flowering plants, but milkweeds are essential for eggs and larvae. The adults will lay 300 to 500 eggs on milkweed over a two to five-week period; and they rarely deposit more than two eggs on an individual plant.

Monarch caterpillars are specialist

herbivores; meaning, they will only feed on milkweeds in the genus *Asclepias*. Milkweed contains chemical compounds that, when eaten by monarch caterpillars, make them unpalatable to predators. The bright colouration of the caterpillars and the butterflies serve as a warning to potential predators: Do not eat!

There are a few species of butterfly that look similar to monarchs to trick predators into thinking they are also unpalatable. Viceroy is the most common monarch-mimic. The colours and patterns are very similar; however, a viceroy has an extra stripe on its hindwing, which intersects the other veins (a minor difference, really).

Monarchs have the longest and largest insect migration in North America. They are the only butterfly known to make a two-way migration like birds do. The eastern population of monarchs, those east of the Rocky Mountains, takes three to four generations to migrate north from their wintering grounds in central Mexico.

Migrating monarchs live two to five weeks. During that time, they travel north, mate and lay eggs that will become the next generation. The last generation of the year, the ones that hatched the farthest north, will migrate south back to Mexico and overwinter there.

This last generation is not reproductive until the following February or March. They can live up to nine months, unlike the summer generations that only live two to five weeks. This impressive

migration evolved because monarchs cannot survive the winter in Canada, unlike other butterflies that can survive winter conditions as either larvae, pupae or even adults.

We have lost as much as 80 per cent of the monarch population in North America. Like many other species at risk, one of the largest threats to these butterflies is habitat loss due to logging, cultivation, urban development, extreme weather and pesticide-use affecting milkweed and wildflowers throughout their range.

What can you do to help?

- Plant milkweed. There are six species of milkweed that naturally occur in Saskatchewan. The most common ones in Saskatchewan are dwarf milkweed and showy milkweed.
- Plant butterfly-friendly flowers that can provide nectar for monarchs (e.g., coneflowers, Black-eyed Susans and various asters). Planting a variety of native flowers will provide sources of nectar from June to October. Before purchasing seed, make sure they haven't been treated with neonicotinoids.
- Avoid mowing suitable monarch habitat (particularly with milkweeds) between June 1 and September 15.
- Reduce or eliminate pesticides, whenever possible.
- Report monarch sightings to the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre.

For more information on monarchs, please visit:



https://www.pcap-sk.org/rsu_docs/documents/guide-to-monarch-butterfly-habitat-final-draft-may-2020.pdf



<https://species-registry.canada.ca/index-en.html#/species/294-90>



<https://www.mission-monarch.org/>



A male monarch butterfly can be identified by the two black spots at the centre of its hindwings. Photo by Sharon Dowdy

South West Saskatchewan
August 10th - 12th

Please Pre-Register
\$75.00 per person

Angus Summer Tour

Register with
Chad & Nikki Wiess
 P.O. Box 37,
 Maple Creek, Saskatchewan S0N 1N0
 Chad Cell: 306.662.7060
 Nikki Cell: 306.661.7208
 email: nikkigannon2@hotmail.com

Wednesday - August 10, 2022
Evening Social and Registration at Cobble Creek Inn
Thursday - August 11, 2022
 7:30 am ~ Depart Cobble Creek Inn for Jensen Red Angus - Coffee and Donuts
 10:00 am ~ Depart for Hawkeye Ranching - Lunch
 1:00 pm ~ Depart for Forbes Ranching
 3:00 pm ~ Depart for Bircham Ranch
 4:00 pm ~ Depart for Bear Creek Angus - Supper
Friday - August 12, 2022
 7:45 am ~ Depart Cobble Creek Inn for
 South Shadow Angus & Boundary Ranch tour on the 'Bench'
 9:15 am ~ Depart for Skull Creek Ranch
 10:45 am ~ Depart for Topham Red Angus - Lunch and Displays
 2:00 pm ~ Depart for Outlaw Coulee Ranch
 5:00 pm ~ Arrive Eastend Hall - Supper