



MONARCH FUN FACTS

-  Monarchs are probably the best known butterflies in North America. Seven U.S. states list the monarch as their official state insect or butterfly.
-  Monarchs have a wingspan of approximately 9 - 11 cm (4 inches) and an average weight of about half a gram – about the weight of a paper clip!
-  Monarchs are in the butterfly family Nymphalidae. Members of this family appear to have only 4 legs, but they really do have 6. The front pair of legs is greatly reduced in size and tucked up under the head.
-  Monarchs have a remarkable long-distance migration. In North America, monarchs overwinter in both Mexico and along the California coast.
-  A monarch can fly up to 2,700 miles (4,345 km). With the same weight to distance ratio, that would be the same as a robin flying to the moon and most of the way back. The longest recorded flight for a monarch was one tagged in Nova Scotia and recovered in central Mexico, a distance of 2,690 miles (4,200 km). In the west, a monarch tagged in Camp Verde, Arizona, flew 1,247 miles (2,006 km) to central Mexico while a monarch tagged in Redmond, Washington, was found in Morro Bay, California, a flight of 865 miles (1,391 km).
-  Butterfly wings are densely covered with scales that improve their aerodynamic efficiency. The upper surface of the thorax is covered with long hair-like scales that help retain heat.
-  The bright patterned orange and black wings of monarchs advertise that they taste bad to predators. Monarchs retain toxins (known as cardiac glycosides) from the milkweed they eat as caterpillars (or larvae), making them poisonous to most vertebrates.
-  Male and female monarchs are easy to tell apart. Males have a black scent spot on a vein on each hind wing while females do not; females have more black scales along their wing veins.
-  Breeding monarchs live two to five weeks. A female may lay several hundred eggs in her lifetime. Eggs hatch after about four to six days in average spring and summer temperatures.
-  Monarch caterpillars eat plants only in the milkweed family. There are over 100 known species of milkweeds in North America. Monarchs have been reported to feed on about 30 of them, but they likely feed on others as well.

 Monarch caterpillars are eating machines! They grow in size by shedding their old skin to reveal a larger new skin (exoskeleton) underneath. They molt, or shed their skin, five times before entering the pupal stage. The entire caterpillar stage lasts about 9 to 14 days under normal summer temperatures.

 A monarch chrysalis is jade-colored with gold spots; the function of these spots is unknown. The chrysalis stage lasts 9 to 14 days in average summer temperatures. (A chrysalis is not a cocoon, which is a covering made of silk, sometimes with leaves, that forms around the pupa of most moths.)

 Monarchs that emerge from a chrysalis in late summer and early fall can live up to 8-9 months to survive the trip to and from their overwintering sites in Mexico and California. A monarch tagged in Ashland, Oregon on June 26 was found still alive in Cayucos, California, 312 days or just over 10 months later.

 Monarchs east of the Rockies winter in the Transverse Neovolcanic Mountain Belt in Mexico. They form colonies of 20 to 50 million butterflies per hectare (that is, 10 million in an area the size of a football field) and remain in tight clusters for up to 5 months before their spring migration. Some monarchs in the east stay in Gulf Coast states through the winter.

 Most monarchs found west of the Rockies winter along the California coast where they roost in Eucalyptus trees, Monterey pines, and Monterey cypresses. In winter they are spread across 300+ sites from Baja California to north of San Francisco. Some monarchs in Arizona and possibly other western states also migrate to Mexico. Small numbers of monarchs also spend the winter in the lower deserts of Arizona and California.

 In the past, Purépechas, an indigenous group that lives in the overwintering region in Mexico, considered monarchs as the souls of the dead and interpreted their arrival as the announcement of the visit by the departed, since it coincides with the second day of November when Mexicans celebrate “El Día de los Muertos” (the Day of the Dead).

 The scientific name of monarchs, *Danaus plexippus*, is from Greek mythology. Danaus was a King of Libya, and Plexippus was his son-in-law. Plexippus can be translated as a driver of horses.

 Monarchs are so named because their orange color was associated with King William of England, an English monarch who had been the Prince of Orange in the Netherlands.

 Monarch butterflies are found throughout the U.S. (including Hawaii, but not Alaska), southern Canada, southern Portugal and Spain, Caribbean Islands, Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Islands.

Monarch Butterfly Fund - monarchconservation.org