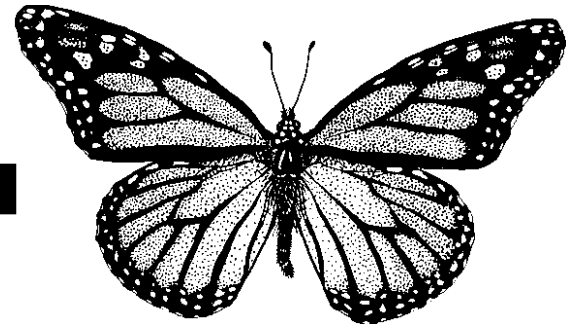




# Monarch Butterfly



Class	Order	Family	Species
Insecta	Lepidoptera	Danaidae	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>

## Range

Throughout North America and Central America, introduced into Hawaii and Australia.

## Habitat

Wide variety; temperate and tropical.

## Niche

A milkweed butterfly, adapted to feed on many of the 100+ species of milkweed plants in North America.

## Diet

**In nature:** caterpillar-milkweed (*Asclepias* spp. only). There are 14 species of *Asclepias* native to California (*A. speciosa*, *A. fascicularis*, *A. erio-carpa*, *A. californica*, *A. asperula* are a few)

**adult:** nectar on many different species of flowering plants.

**In culture:** same as above.

## Reproduction

**Growth:** complete metamorphosis.  
**Egg:** glued to undersides of milkweed plant leaves, hatch in four days.  
**Larva:** in warm weather 13 days, cooler 21 days.  
**Pupa:** 1 week  
**Adult:** 3-4 generations; about 33 days from egg to adult. 7 days to reach sexual maturity. Adult lifespan varies depending on time of year.

## Physical Characteristics

### Caterpillar/Larva

**Mouthparts:** chewing.  
**Wings:** none.  
**Legs:** 3 pair thoracic and 5 pair fleshy pro-legs.

### Adult

**Mouthparts:** siphoning-sucking.  
**Wings:** 2 pair (2 forewings, 2 hindwings).  
**Legs:** 3 pair.

**Egg:** yellow.  
**Larva:** black, white stripes, smooth.  
**Chrysalis:** green with gold trim.  
**Adult:** wing span 4 inches; orange with black veins; males have a black spot on hind wing not present in female

## Conservation Concerns

The major threats to the Monarch butterfly are as follows. The urban expansion and agricultural use of herbicides contribute to destruction of overwintering trees (including *Pinus radiata* and *Eucalyptus globulus* (native and non native); of larval foodplants; and nectar sources for the adults along their migratory routes. The biggest threat to the eastern population in Mexico is timber harvesting in and around the overwintering sites, which is destroying the environment crucial to their winter survival.

The Monarch's migration is considered to be an "**endangered phenomenon**".

## Special Adaptations

**Physiology:** The milkweed plants they consume as larvae contain cardiac glycosides, chemicals potentially dangerous to mammals and birds. When ingested, the chemical can have the effect of slowing or stopping the heart. The bright coloration of the monarch is a warning: "Don't eat me, I taste bad!" The milkweed's glycosides are retained in the body fluid, and especially the cuticle, of the adult butterfly.

## Sources

(25) (26) (44)



