

## Monarch Butterfly



### COOL FACTS:

<b>Scientific name:</b>	Danaus Plexippus
<b>Average size:</b>	Wing span 9-10cm
<b>Average life span:</b>	6 - 8 weeks for summer generations 6 - 8 months for winter generations
<b>Type:</b>	Insect
<b>Did you know?</b>	There are 142 species of butterflies in Ontario.

### PHYSIOLOGY

The Monarch butterflies wings are orange with black veins, with a row of white dots around the outer edges. The Monarchs body is black and also has white dots. These bright colours are to ward off predators because the Monarch is poisonous if eaten. (Due to the ingestion of milk weed)

Three to four generation of Monarchs can be born in one summer. The female can lay up to 400 eggs and attaches them to the underside of milkweed leaves. They can take anywhere from 3 to 12 days to hatch. The black, yellow and white striped caterpillar (sometimes called larvae) feed on the leaves of the milkweed plant. The milkweed toxins (cardiac glycosides) are eaten by the caterpillar and stays with it into adult hood. After about 2 weeks the caterpillar is full grown and attaches itself to a twig and begins the transformation into a pupa or chrysalis. This stage takes a few hours to complete. Once the pupa is formed it will be another 2 weeks before the caterpillar metamorphoses into a butterfly.

A butterfly cannot fly when it first emerges from the pupa stage and it waits until the fluid from it is body flows to its wings so that they can be expanded for flight. The average Monarch Butterfly lives from 2 to 6 weeks. The exceptions to this are those that migrate south for the winter.

### HABITAT/ BEHAVIOUR

Monarch Butterflies live in open woodlands, fields, meadows, marshes, roadsides and gardens. Traveling from plant to plant to drink its nectar makes them great pollinators. They transfer pollen that gets on their legs when they land, from flower to flower.

Many migrate to Mexico and California which is about a 4,000 km flight. This migration begins in early fall and takes about 2 months to complete. Once in the warmer climate they live in pine groves, cypress, and mesquite trees, living off the fat they have stored. In early spring they start feeding and head back home.

### PROTECTION/THREATS

The use of herbicides on milkweed and other wild plants has reduced the food supplies for Monarch Butterflies. The destruction to migratory sites and urban sprawl also plays a role in the diminishment of Monarch Butterflies. Climate change also has an effect on the migration of the butterflies.

We can help by building a backyard butterfly gardens with flowers and milkweed plants.

### MORE COOL FACTS:

Butterflies are the second largest group of pollinators... next to bees.

Butterflies don't have lungs. An entomologist is a scientist who studies insects.