



Habitat Herald

A Publication of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

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Spring 2013

Bringing Back the Monarch, Keeping the Magic Alive

by Nicole Hamilton

Monarch butterflies, they're our charismatic fliers, and our most recognizable butterfly. They're the species that when asked, everyone knows the butterfly we're talking about. We've been touched by them as children. We've enjoyed seeing them flutter through our neighborhoods in the summer. They are the long distance fliers that in the fall make an epic mass migration traveling as many as 5,000 miles from Canada and across the United States to a tiny mountain area in Central Mexico.

To survive, Monarchs need milkweed plants to lay their eggs on. It is the only plant that eggs are laid on and it is the only plant that Monarchs eat as caterpillars. As such, the basic truth is, if you don't have milkweed, you cannot have Monarchs.

Additionally, adult Monarchs need nectar. They can get nectar from a range of plants through the summer, but as we move into fall and they head south on their great migration, they especially need our native fall nectar plants like goldenrod and asters. They need these plants to not only make the journey to Mexico, but also to build up the fat they need to make it through winter and start the journey northward in spring.

The third thing Monarchs need is the overwintering grounds in Mexico. The place they migrate to is a tiny mountain sanctuary near Angangueo, Mexico, where 216 square miles of forest has been established as the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. The reserve is half the size of Loudoun County. Here, Monarchs congregate to overwinter together and ultimately occupy only a few acres of forest within the reserve.

The Plight of the Monarch

In spite of their majesty, the Monarchs' great mass migration is imperiled. Their numbers have been on a steady decline for the past 15 years. The main culprits: loss of milkweed and nectar

plants due to development, use of "Round-up Ready" seed crops, drought through the Midwest and loss of forest in the Monarch sanctuaries due to illegal logging.

The graph on page three tells the story of decline. In Mexico each year, researchers go into the sanctuary and make population estimates. Because Monarchs congregate, they are not found throughout the sanctuaries, but clumped together by the millions in patches of the forest, linking legs as they hang in the trees to conserve energy. In past years, the aggregation of Monarchs has been as high as 20.97 hectares (52 acres). In these congregations, one would find 10 to 50 million Monarchs per hectare. So, in a boom year like 1996, the population was somewhere around 200 million to one billion Monarchs strong.



Helping Monarchs

Photo by Nicole Hamilton

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President's Message

by Nicole Hamilton



*El Rosario Sanctuary, February 2013
Photo by Elizabeth Evans*

"Raindrops to puddles to rivers to oceans." I've been thinking about this saying a lot lately, especially as we get rolling with our Monarch campaign. It's the notion that while the actions of one of us may seem isolated and insignificant in the grand scheme, once they are joined with the actions and energy and movement of others, the impact grows, a message is sent, and things start to happen.

Taking our Monarch campaign as an example: Planting a single garden for Monarchs

may not do much to help the population overall but what if that garden inspires another family to plant a garden, and what if that family brings the idea to their workplace or church and a group of people there works together to plant a garden and what if that causes a community to not only look at their landscaping differently but also to plant native plants that attract Monarchs and other wildlife, and what if multiple communities see this and band together to restore a wildlife corridor, and what if that corridor spreads into another

county, and what if someone in that next county plants a garden, and what if that garden inspires another family to plant a garden?

I should tell you that the reason the raindrops analogy came to the forefront for me was because someone asked me recently, "Can we make a difference?" For me that question is akin to asking about one's purpose in life, and I'm not sure what he expected me to say, but my immediate response went back to something my dad always said to me as a kid, "Never try, never win." So I always try.

Can we make a difference? I say yes. I say we better try...and in doing so, what if we ignite a spark in the person, the County, the State, the Country next to us? What if? I'll plant my garden, raindrop as it may be. I know through the different programs that we've done lately that there are a lot of you out there who are excited to make a difference, to plant your gardens, and I've heard you talk about your friends in the town or next state over who want to talk to their churches or HOAs about starting Monarch Waystations too. So let's do it - and let's see together what rivers and oceans these raindrops lead us to! I'm sure they will be beautiful.

Happy planting,

Nicole



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Coordinator: Donna Quinn
Editors: Karen Coleman
Mary Ann Good
Lindsey Brookbank

Design: Lorrie Bennett

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The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) group of volunteers who share a common goal of protecting and perpetuating natural habitats for the benefit of both people and wildlife. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

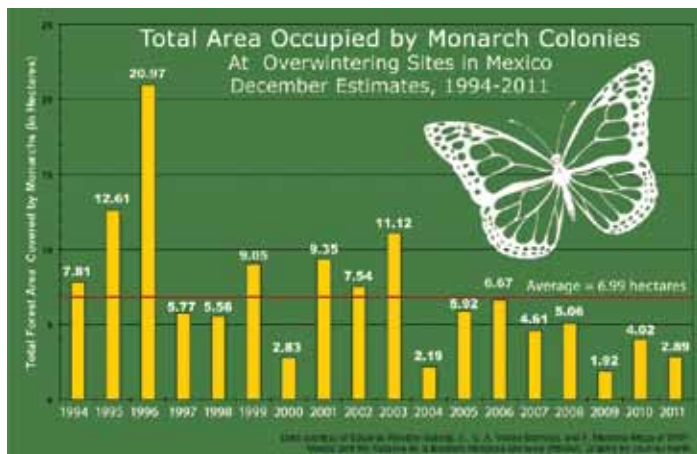
The Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Board meets the first Tuesday of each month. Board meetings are open to all current members. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion at upcoming meetings, contact Nicole Hamilton.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--|
| President | Nicole Hamilton | 703-999-9000 | nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org |
| Past President | Joe Coleman | 540-554-2542 | jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org |
| Vice President | Janet Locklear | 703-201-7171 | jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org |
| Secretary | Lynn Webster | 540-882-3823 | lwebster@verizon.net |
| Treasurer | Linda Sieh | 703-229-7871 | lsieh@loudounwildlife.org |
| Programs /Field Trips | Jim McWalters | | jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org |
| Habitat Restoration | Joe Coleman | 540-554-2542 | jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org |
| Membership | Vacant | | |
| Fundraising | Eric Gulick | | egulick@loudounwildlife.org |
| Youth Environmental Education | Paul Miller | 540-882-3112 | pmiller@loudounwildlife.org |
| Media Coordinator | Monica Lauw | | mlauw@loudounwildlife.org |
| Volunteer Coordinator | Vacant | | |
| Conservation Advocacy | Andrea Soccio | 703-407-0946 | asoccio@loudounwildlife.org |
| Habitat Herald | Donna Quinn | 703-217-3544 | dquinn@loudounwildlife.org |
| Community Outreach | Vacant | | |
| Stream Monitoring | Robert Bavis | 703-966-7685 | rbavis@loudounwildlife.org |
| Bird Population Surveys | Joe Coleman | 540-554-2542 | jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org |
| Bluebird Monitoring | Janet Locklear | 703-201-7171 | jlocklear@loudounwildlife.org |
| Amphibian Monitoring | Nicole Hamilton | 703-999-9000 | nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org |
| Administrative Assistant | Jill Miller | | jmiller@loudounwildlife.org |



■ *Bringing Back the Monarchs, continued*

But look at the graph. What is happening to the population?



Sure, the numbers go up and down each year (and within that story there is a glimmer of hope that their numbers may recover again), but the overall population is moving in a stair-step pattern down, with five-year averages continuously decreasing:

1994 - 1998 average: 10.54 hectares

1999 - 2003 average: 7.97 hectares

2004 - 2008 average: 4.89 hectares

2009 - 2012 average (using estimate of 2 hectares for 2012): 2.70 hectares

This year, the 2012 population is estimated to be less than two hectares worth of Monarch, and researchers estimate the population of Monarchs that reached Mexico to be approximately 80 million.

What does this say for the future of Monarchs? As a species, they probably won't go extinct. There are small populations that breed year round in Florida, South Carolina, Arizona, California and along the Gulf Coast. There are even Monarchs in New Zealand, Peru, Spain and other countries, but the great migration and magnificent numbers could very well end.

The majority of Monarchs migrate through the Midwest. However, continued drought, the increased use of "Round-up Ready" seed crops, and accompanying use of herbicides prevalent in the Midwest, took a toll on milkweed and nectar plants. The impact on Monarchs breeding in and migrating through the Midwest was severe. Last fall, citizens like you and me posted their Monarch sightings to Journey North. In comparing sightings from 2011 to 2012, we see Monarchs did not come through the Midwest in the same numbers as they have in the past. Instead, Monarchs coming from the East Coast were a higher than usual percentage of the population, and could possibly be the majority that made it to Mexico. That makes habitat in our area and along our migration routes that much more important.

As you read this article, Monarch butterflies have already left Mexico and are starting their journey northward. They are laying eggs on milkweed plants in Texas and other points across the United States, and the first generation of 2013 is starting to emerge. Here in Loudoun, we may see Monarchs as early as May or June, but most of us will see them in mid-July.

Hope for the Future?

From a habitat perspective, the deck is stacked against Monarchs, but insects are made for bad times. You saw in the population graph their ability to rebound. In 2009, their population was just 1.92 hectares, but the next year, it reached 4.02 hectares. Insects have the capacity to rebound if the habitat and weather conditions are there to support them.

A female Monarch can lay hundreds of eggs in her lifetime. Only about 10 percent of her young will survive. But even if she lives in a time when the population is low, if there are milkweed and nectar plants when she needs them, she and her sisters could rebuild the population—but habitat must be there.

We Are Responsible

Does it matter if we lose this great migration? In the human context, probably not. We will still go to the grocery store to buy our food. We will still get up each day and do what we do, and some number of Monarchs will persist. But we would lose one of the great migrations on this planet—a great migration that rivals that of the wildebeests of the Serengeti, and a migration that happens through our front yards.

And that simple fact—that this migration happens through our front yards and back yards, along our roadsides and through our open spaces—means this is a problem we can help solve. Habitat for Monarchs, which is also habitat for so many other species, is habitat that can be created in places we walk through and drive by every day. We don't have to go somewhere else to make a difference. We don't need special degrees or training. All we need is to plant plants and manage wild areas differently.

■ *Continued on page 4*



Monarch on Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
Photo by Jim Clark



■ *Bringing Back the Monarchs, continued*

The Solution—It's All Around Us

This year, we launched our Monarch butterfly campaign. Our goal is to reach 2,013 people through educational programs and outreach efforts, and to work with people across Loudoun to plant Monarch Waystations at homes, schools, churches and businesses. As part of this, we also set a target of raising and releasing 2,013 Monarchs this summer. After all, there's nothing more magical than watching a Monarch caterpillar found in your garden grow, develop, transform and finally sit on your finger, observe the world with new eyes and take flight for the first time. We will also create connections in Mexico through programs like the Journey South symbolic migration, and we'll lay the groundwork to keep this campaign going into future years.

Ultimately, we look forward to working with the Virginia Department of Transportation, Dominion Power and other organizations that manage large tracts of land and roadsides to manage those rights of ways differently by cutting down on mowing and herbicides. This also saves money in the process.



Safe travels!

Photo by Liam McGranaghan

What Can You Do?

Look at your garden, your school, your church or place of work with the eyes of a butterfly. Plant some milkweeds and nectar plants and certify that space as a Monarch Waystation. A waystation can be as small as a container garden, as large as a field or power-line cut, or anything in between.

We've worked with four local nurseries, which will stock native, pesticide-free milkweed and nectar plants starting in April. Visit one of these nurseries, and you'll have the plants you need to get started: Catoctin Gardens (Leesburg), WildWood/Overbrook (Round Hill), Abernethy & Spencer (Purcellville) and Petals & Hedges (Paeonian Springs). If you are a current member with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, you will receive a 10 percent discount at these nurseries just by showing your membership card. If your membership has expired, renew today and we'll send you your card.

Visit www.loudounwildlife.org to sign up for special announcements and updates on our Monarch campaign, and to download tip sheets and fun activities posted on the site. Let's keep the magic of the Monarchs alive.



Photo provided by Julie Zickefoose

Hurry up and register!

2013 Virginia Society of Ornithologists Annual Meeting, April 26 - 28

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is hosting the 2013 Annual VSO Meeting from April 26 - 28. This fun-filled weekend will include engaging programs, exhibits including live raptors, vendors, presentations, and, of course, great birding!

Highlighting the weekend is the opportunity to meet Julie Zickefoose and hear her keynote address, *The Bluebird Effect*. Followers of Julie's blog know Julie's extraordinary talent, experience and insight – and revel in the world of wonders she opens for us. Julie will also be participating in walks and signing books.

Don't wait, space is limited! Register today at www.loudounwildlife.org/Event_VSO_Mtg_2013.html if you haven't already done so.



Lola, the Monarch with the Injured Wing

by Mona Miller, aka "the Butterfly Lady"

There are people in our lives who cross our paths once in a lifetime. Some of these people leave a part of themselves with us. They become our friends, and they enrich our lives before they leave. This is what happened with Lola, but she was not a person – she was a Monarch Butterfly.

When does a story start and when does it end? Lola's story with me started on August 20, 2012, when the webmaster of the Washington Area Butterfly Club forwarded me a message: "Monarch Help Needed! I noticed a fallen Monarch today. His wing was torn and he could not fly... We have the butterfly inside right now because of the rain and failing wing. Any help would be appreciated." I emailed the person back to learn more. She responded that the top left wing was limp and not moving. I called her to say my friend Harry Pavulaan (a Loudoun County butterfly "guru") was dropping by later in the day and asked if she could bring the butterfly to us. Debbie and her daughter, Ella, drove over one and half hours from the Baltimore area to bring us the butterfly. When Harry looked at the wing, he decided it could not be fixed as it was broken where it connected to the thorax. Debbie and Ella decided to leave the butterfly, a female, with me. I asked Ella to give the butterfly a name and she said, "I think I will call her Lola."

On Lola's first night, I hand-fed her a solution of 1 part honey to 10 parts water. She thrived on this honey solution fed to her two times a day. Three days later on August 22, she began laying eggs on milkweed leaves. I carefully removed these leaves and put them into containers. While Monarch eggs usually hatch within three days, these took five days. Anyone who raises Monarchs knows that caterpillars wait for no man. Once hatched, I immediately had to start collecting milkweed for them to eat. Monarch Butterflies use milkweed (*Asclepias*) as a host plant. There are at least 15 different species of milkweed in Virginia.

On August 25, I found another injured Monarch in the garden. His left wing was torn and I repaired it, but later in the day I found him flopping on the ground. He had completely lost his wing! I named him Lucas and decided to take him in to meet Lola. Lucas and Lola became a couple.

Every day, I would feed Lola and then put her out into a net cylinder that contained potted milkweed. She laid eggs every day. I didn't count the eggs, they were too numerous, but I estimate she laid over 500 eggs. Monarchs can lay 600 – 900 eggs during their lifetime, but the average number is 100 – 300.

As Lola continued to lay eggs, I decided to share the wealth. I gave eggs and newly hatched caterpillars to teachers in Loudoun County, Fairfax County, and many individuals in the Northern Virginia area. I raised over 300 of Lola's babies myself. Many of Lola's offspring were tagged and released at events in locations such as Sky Meadow State Park, Runnymede Park in Herndon, and Willowsford Farm in Ashburn. Everywhere Lola's progeny went, they brought awe and joy to adults and children.

Lola's life ended on September 5 – but her story does not end. While Monarchs hatched during the breeding season only live 4-6 weeks, those that emerge in August and September live 7-8 months and migrate to Mexico. Many of Lola's offspring were tagged before release so if any of these tags are found in Mexico, we will have proof some of them survived the long migration. Even though Lola herself could not make the journey,

my hope is that some of her offspring made it to Mexico and survived the winter. I hope they are starting the return north and will continue Lola's story. When we see Monarchs again in Loudoun County this summer, there will be more gardens for them to visit thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Monarch Project and others who care about them.



*Lola drinking honey water
Photo by Mona Miller*



*Releasing one of Mona's
offspring
Photo by Donna Quinn*



For more information on the LWC Monarch Campaign, please visit this webpage:
www.loudounwildlife.org/Event_Monarch_Butterflies_1.html





Announcements

Can You Fill One of Our Open Roles?

Membership Development Chair: Develops annual membership development plan, reports membership data monthly to Board, leads membership development activities.

Membership Renewal Coordinator: Schedules and develops renewal letters/follow-ups, provides printer with latest member addresses for mailings, coordinates fall membership renewal mailing.

Fair Booth Coordinator: Registers Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy for fairs, contacts and schedules volunteers to man the booth, preps materials boxes to go to fairs, identifies and develops activities/displays for fair booth.

Volunteer Tracking Coordinator: Contacts new volunteers to discuss opportunities and interests, works with Board to understand volunteer needs and make potential matches, tracks degree to which new volunteers are engaged.

Habitat Restoration Committee Chair: Coordinates quarterly meeting to identify projects, works with HR project coordinators to identify project resources and advertise events, reports project activity to Board.



Butterfly Weed, Monarch caterpillar - and frass!
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

“Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly.”

Proverb

Drive for Charity — May 16, 2013

Drive for Charity is a day each year in which tolls collected on the Dulles Greenway are dedicated to Loudoun County charities. It is often the busiest day of the year on the roadway, which shows your support for the organizations that help Loudoun. The Dulles Greenway is proud to have contributed \$261,652.06 in 2012 and \$1,528,462.06 over the last seven years! Last year's recipients included: Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, the March of Dimes, ECHO, the Loudoun Abused Women's Shelter, Fresh Air/Full Care and Dulles Greenway Citizenship Award.

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has once again been chosen as one of the recipients. Support Drive for Charity on Thursday, May 16, 2013, and see 100 percent of your tolls returned to the community. Thank you, Dulles Greenway, for your commitment to making Loudoun a greener place to live!

Great Opportunity for LWC Members

The Youth Environmental Education Committee of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy is pleased to offer two scholarships to interested adults (age 18 and older) for this year's Adult Nature Camp in Vesuvius, VA. Adult Nature Camp, located in the idyllic valley by Big Mary's Creek in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Rockbridge County, has been in existence since the early 1940s. It is once again offering a four-day nature camp for adults, August 16–20, 2013. If you are interested in participating in this camp experience you must: (1) be a member of LWC, (2) be at least 18 years of age, and (3) provide a written explanation (one page or less) of why you wish to attend and how you hope to apply what you learn to the mission of LWC. Space in the camp is limited so all interested participants must submit their paperwork by May 1 to Paul Miller at 38712 Rickard Road, Lovettsville, VA 20180. **More information about Adult Nature Camp is available at www.naturecamp.net.**



Announcements, cont.

2013 Annual Meeting — Milkweed Patch Safari

The highlight of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Annual Meeting this year will be a pictorial Milkweed Patch Safari. Current LWC members are invited to join guest speaker Alonso Abugattas for this entertaining event showcasing the fascinating relationships between animals and plants in the milkweed community. Learn about milkweed natural history, pollinator interactions, ethnobotany, folklore, and more!

Currently the Natural Resources Manager for Arlington County, Alonso Abugattas is a well-known local naturalist, storyteller, and environmental educator. He is a Master Naturalist and Master Gardener and serves as an instructor for both. A co-founder of the Washington Area Butterfly Club, he has also held several offices for the Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, including president. Alonso is a Certified Heritage Interpreter through the National Association for Interpretation, for which he is the Co-chair of the Beltway Chapter and has conducted numerous trainings on a local, regional, and national level for fellow naturalists.

All current LWC members are invited to attend. Enjoy light refreshments while listening to flute music performed by Karen Strick and Lisa Schoepfle. Shop for milkweed and other native plants. Help support LWC programs and enter your bids in our silent auction of original artwork and more. A short business meeting will be held and will feature award presentations to science fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists, and the volunteer of the year.

Sunday, May 19, 4:00 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. at Morven Park.
Registration required: sign up at www.loudounwildlife.org.

*“Just living is not enough,”
said the butterfly, “one
must have sunshine,
freedom and a little flower.”*

Hans Christian Anderson

Children’s Nature Book Club

The Children’s Nature Book Club welcomes young nature lovers 3 to 6 years old, accompanied by a parent or other caregiver. We meet at the Rust Sanctuary to listen to a story, take a nature walk, and participate in a music/arts/craft activity with a nature-based theme. Instructors are Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy volunteers, previous preschool teachers, and Master Naturalists. For more information, visit www.audubonnaturalist.org/index.php/about-ans/sanctuaries/rust-leesburg-va. Pre-registration is required.

Enrollment is limited. Participants should dress to be outside—boots are recommended.

Where: Rust Nature Sanctuary, 802 Children’s Center Rd., Leesburg

When: Spring dates: 4/5, 4/12, 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10
Reservations required: pdaley@loudounwildlife.org,
susanneo@audobonnaturalist.org, or call 540-338-6528
or 703-669-0000x1

Cost: \$3.00 per child per class

Co-sponsored by Audubon Naturalist Society and Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Thank You, Loudoun County Department of General Services!

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy thanks the Loudoun County Department of General Services for their generous donation towards the purchase of additional stream monitoring equipment. The department provided field microscopes for our volunteers to use while monitoring benthic organisms and a digital microscope for instructional purposes. The data obtained by our stream monitoring volunteers are used by Loudoun County and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to assess the stream conditions in the county.





Chirps

by Donna Quinn

"Unearthly beauty had appeared to her, a vision of glory to stop her in the road. For her alone these orange boughs lifted, these long shadows became a brightness rising. It looked like the inside of joy, if a person could see that. A valley of lights, an ethereal wind. It had to mean something."

Flight Behavior

By Barbara Kingsolver

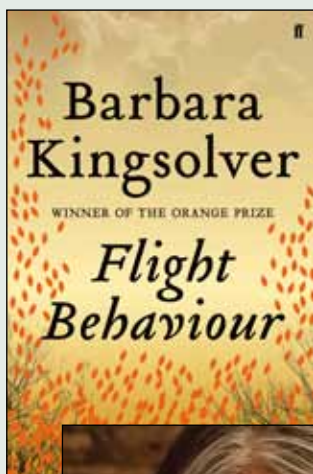
"You never knew which split second might be the zigzag bolt dividing all that went before from everything that comes next." Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*

In Dellarobia Turnbow's life, that zigzag bolt appears in the form of a glowing forest, "blazed with its own internal flame," as she witnesses the sight of millions of Monarch butterflies roosting above her husband's family farm nestled in the Appalachian Mountains. The invasion of butterflies ignites other invasions — tourists seeking beauty, church-goers seeking miracles, conservationists pursuing a cause, and scientists seeking understanding of something gravely amiss. For Dellarobia and the other characters in *Flight Behavior*, Monarchs represent change and trigger awareness of shifting values, unfulfilled needs, and the desire for a better life. "She raised her eyes to the sky... saw light streaming through glowing wings. Like embers, she thought, a flood of fire, the warmth they had craved for so long."

Flight Behavior poses a fictional question — what if the natural world was so profoundly altered by climate change that wildlife was forced to alter behavior molded by eons of evolution in mere generations, and what if weather extremes became the norm? Readers understand this is not just a fictional scenario. Today, the effects of climate change are revealed in the northward shift in plant hardiness zones, the earlier migration of many bird species, and the increased frequency and intensity of super-storms, droughts and wildfires. Devastating declines in once-common insect populations, such as Monarchs, dramatically reflect the combined effects of climate change, habitat loss, increased use of pesticides and the planting of genetically modified crops. The decline of Monarchs is not fiction. There is no denying changes in climate are real and reflected in the behavior of those whose existence depends on constants such as average temperature and rainfall.

Whether it is in the fictional world of *Flight Behavior* or in real life, the plight of Monarchs moves us and draws people together. Conservationists, artists, writers, teachers, students, scientists, poets, members of the clergy and media, government officials, the young and

the old, men, women and children — people are uniting to protect this beautiful butterfly which represents so much to so many of us. In real life, we are witnessing the effects of climate change but also the impact of ordinary people making a big difference when they actively engage in conservation. In *Flight Behavior* and real life, the future remains uncertain. Glimmers of hope appear, however, in the raised awareness of the plight of Monarchs and the astonishing capacity of people to change things for the better.



Resources:

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-02-06/classified/sc-home-0206-garden-usda-hardiness-20120206_1_plant-hardiness-zone-map-new-map-zone-change

<http://uncnews.unc.edu/content/view/5120/107/>

■ Continued on page 9

Butterfly-friendly Foods

By Mike Snow, Director of Farm Operations, Willowsford Farm

Butterfly-friendly foods, what the heck are you talking about? Yes, there is such thing! Eating, as they say, is an agricultural act. And, there are different acts of agriculture. Many local farms, whether certified organic or not, embrace wild spaces, avoid using pesticides and invite all sorts of critters to the farm. In fact, many of these critters keep farm pests in check; some also provide pollination services that ultimately put food on your table. You can be a part of these efforts by getting to know your local farms and by supporting what we do for our community with your food dollars.

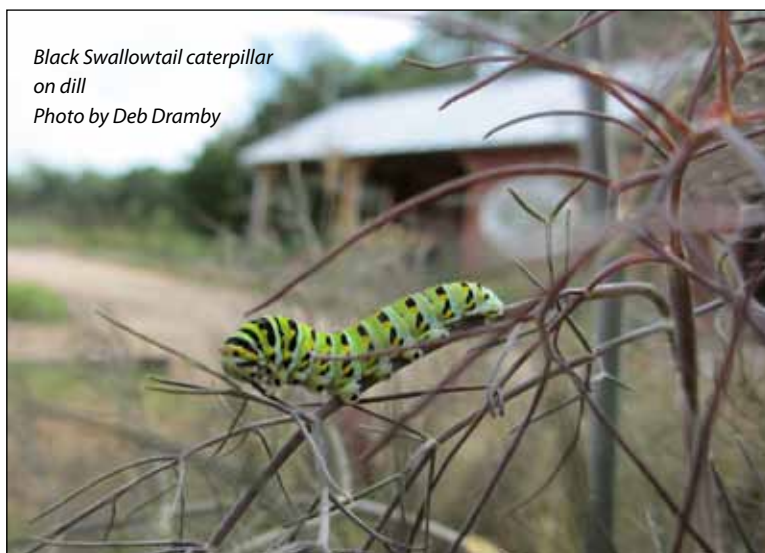
We take different approaches to managing our farms. There's the Lazy Fair approach, where we set aside parts of the farm to be what they want to be. That is, we stop mowing. At other times, or in other places, we use an Old Man With A Bag of Seed strategy, where we sow or plant native (and, yes, some non-native!) species in designated areas. These "insectary species" provide food, pollen, or shelter for insects, especially beneficial kinds. You might think more insects would mean more pests, but just the opposite. We want invertebrates in the field! Spiders, bees, true bugs, lacewings, beetles, parasitic wasps... We find the more we have the more we get – meaning, the more and more different kinds of plants and habitat niches we provide, the more in balance our farm seems to be. Yes, we see pests here and there, but by inviting ecological diversity, there are more natural predators that keep those pests in check.

There are lots of things we can do as farmers to support ecological diversity. And there are many things you can do, too, starting with choosing to eat food from farmers who farm with this philosophy. Get to know some of your local farmers and get your veggies, fruit, meat, dairy, and breads from them. Foods from local farms will taste better and be fresher and healthier than what you get at a grocery store. Shop at a farmers market, farm stand, or an organic Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

While we hope you'll visit us at our Farm Stand in Ashburn or join our CSA, there are many great farmers in Loudoun County. Learn about how they steward their land and share your concerns to live responsibly and take care of the land. You can learn more at www.willowsfordfarm.com, www.loudounfarms.org, www.buylocalvirginia.org.

By joining a CSA or visiting a Farm Stand, you:

- Eat seasonal, fresh, and clean food
- Learn to be a better, more creative cook
- Support local farmers who keep land in our community open, productive, and biologically diverse
- Bring your family to the farm to learn or play
- Know your farmer and know your food
- Provide safe haven for the bugs and other critters we need to support ecological diversity



*Black Swallowtail caterpillar
on dill
Photo by Deb Dramby*

■ *Chirps, continued*

For more information:

Field Guide to the Butterflies of Loudoun County, by Nicole Hamilton.
How to Raise Monarch Butterflies: A Step-by-Step Guide for Kids, by Carol Pasternak.
Milkweed, Monarchs and More, A Field Guide to the Invertebrate Community in the Milkweed Patch, by Ba Rea, Karen Oberhauser and Michael A. Quinn.
Nomads of the Wind: The Journey of the Monarch Butterfly and Other Wonders of the Butterfly World, by Ingo Arndt.

For young butterfly lovers:

Monarch and Milkweed, by Helen Frost and Leonid Gore.
A Monarch Butterfly's Life, by John Himmelman.
The Life Cycle of a Butterfly, by Bobbie Kalman.

Chirps recommends:

Flight of the Butterflies 3-D: Unravel the mysteries of the Monarch migration and experience the movie *Flight of the Butterflies* in 3-D at the Samuel C. Johnson IMAX Theater / Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC. For showtimes visit www.si.edu/Imax/movie/71.



Programs and Field Trips

Space is limited for many of these programs and field trips. Please call the designated program contact for further information and to reserve your spot.



Birding Banshee

Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Friends of Banshee Reeks at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve for the monthly bird walk. Because of its rich and varied habitat, it is a birding hot spot. Please bring binoculars if you have them. **Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Second Saturdays: April 13, May 11, June 8 and July 13 at 8:00 a.m.

LWC Board Meeting — The Board typically meets the first Tuesday of every month at 7:00 p.m. All LWC members are welcome. **Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org for additional information.**

Native Plant Sale — **Saturday, April 6, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Rust Nature Sanctuary.** Native plants are beautiful and grow better because they are adapted for our weather conditions and soils; they also provide greater benefit to our native wildlife because plants and animals evolved together. Hill House Farm and Native Nursery (www.hillhousenativeplants.com) and Nature-By-Design (www.nature-by-design.com) will be selling plants. To see plants each nursery carries or to place orders ahead of time (all nursery stock is not present), visit their websites.

The Magic of Monarchs — **Wednesday, April 10, 7:00 p.m., Location TBD.** Nicole Hamilton and six friends traveled to the mountains of Mexico to visit the Monarch sanctuaries this past February. Come hear their tales of adventure, learn about the status of the Monarch population, and gather materials and information to jump in to the 2013 campaign for people across Loudoun to plant Monarch Waystations and raise and release 2,013 Monarchs this summer and fall! **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.**

Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival — **Saturday, April 20, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., and Sunday, April 21, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.** The Leesburg Flower and Garden Festival is a great way to kick off your spring activities! Visit us at our booth for hands-on activities for kids of all ages, see what bear scat really looks like, quiz yourself on different wildlife tracks and signs, and pick up lots of free handouts with ideas for the whole family to get outside and explore nature. We'll have information and displays on our Monarch Campaign as well as the Audubon at Home Program. For more information on the event, visit the festival website at www.idalee.org/parks/events/FlowerGarden.

Spring into Willowsford — **Sunday, April 21, 2:00 p.m.** Willowsford is a new community in eastern Loudoun where natural areas are being preserved and protected. Join us as we explore the woods and fields, identify birds, look for frogs and salamanders in the vernal pools and other wetlands, identify animal tracks and talk about the relationships between these varied habitats and wildlife residents. Meet at the Farm Shed which is located across from the pool. Park on Founders Drive or in the pool parking area. Please bring binoculars if you have them. This is a family-friendly event. Space is limited so please register early. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Virginia Society of Ornithologists Annual Meeting — **Friday evening, April 26 – Sunday morning, April 28, at Carradoc Hall, Leesburg.** This year's annual meeting, hosted by Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, will have great programs and field trips for you to enjoy — including Julie Zickefoose, well-known naturalist, author and artist, as the keynote banquet speaker on Saturday night. Special lodging rates are available at Carradoc Hall; reservations must be made by March 26. Visit our website and learn more about this event. **Registration deadline is April 15: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**

Earthday@Loudoun Festival — **Sunday, April 28, 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Willow Creek Farm, 42920 Broadlands Blvd, Broadlands.** This free festival will offer virtually everything for the eco-conscious: a marketplace offering earth-friendly products and services, hands-on educational activities for all ages and many other entertainment options. The festival is designed to be a family-oriented event to inform Loudouners on the environmental changes happening in the local area. Every year new performances bring diversity and fun to the event. For more information, visit www.earthdayatloudoun.org. Stop by the LWC tent for free materials and information!

Celebrate Birds, Go Birding! International Migratory Bird Day — **Saturday, May 4 – Sunday, May 12.** During spring, thousands of migratory birds move through North America to their nesting territories. Some will stay and nest in our area, while others will spend only a few days here replenishing their energy before continuing a journey that may be thousands of miles long. To celebrate and highlight this natural phenomenon and the importance of natural habitats, LWC has scheduled several IMBD walks between May 4 and May 12. **To see a listing of all the walks and participate, visit our website, and Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**



Small Planting/Wetland Restoration — Saturday, May 18, 10 a.m., Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center, Leesburg. Join LWC as we continue to plant the recently restored wetlands at the Equine Medical Center adjacent to Morven Park. We will be planting shrubs and herbaceous material that will improve both the existing wetland habitat and the water quality of Big Spring Creek. Please bring work gloves and, if you have one, a shovel with your name on it. This project is a cooperative effort between Loudoun County, the Equine Medical Center and LWC, with a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. If you are interested in helping, contact Scott Sandberg at 571-258-3304 or scott.sandberg@loudoun.gov.

Wildlife Rehabilitation Program — Sunday, May 19, 2:00 p.m., Gum Spring Library's large meeting room. Becky Shore, Education Coordinator at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, will lead this family-oriented event, with information on the animals that live in our backyards and how we can be helpful "neighbors" to them. The program will also describe how the center rescues injured, orphaned and sick native wildlife, and takes care of them before they are released back into the wild. This free program is co-sponsored by the Gum Spring Library. Questions: Contact either Julia Blackburn at Julia.Blackburn@loudoun.gov or Jim McWalters at jmcwalters@loudounwildlife.org.

LWC Annual Meeting — Sunday, May 19, 4:00 – 6:45 p.m., Morven Park. Each year LWC's Annual Meeting provides an opportunity for members to gather, celebrate another year of accomplishments and hear an interesting guest speaker. This year, when we launch our Monarch Campaign, we are honored to welcome Alonso Abugattas, well-known local naturalist and environmental educator. He will guide us on a pictorial safari through the milkweed patch. All current LWC members are invited to attend and learn about the natural history, pollinator interactions, ethnobotany and folklore connected to this extraordinary plant group. The annual meeting also includes light refreshments; flute music performed by Karen Strick and Lisa Schoepfle; a silent auction of original artwork and more; award presentations to science fair winners, Roger Tory Peterson Young Naturalists and the volunteer of the year; and a short business meeting. Milkweed and other native plants will be available for sale. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Rhonda Chocha at 571-246-7408 or rchocha@hotmail.com.**

Loudoun County Bird Atlas Blockbusting — May 25–27, June 15–16, June 29–30, July 6–7, Locations and Times TBD. As the Bird Atlas enters its final year, we are dedicating several prime weekends to survey the top-priority atlas blocks. Atlasing can be very rewarding, treating you to an inside glimpse of a bird's personal life. Experienced atlasers will lead small groups on atlas surveys throughout our beautiful county during these weekends. Please contact Atlas Coordinator Spring Ligi at sligi@loudounwildlife.org with your preferred dates and area of the county. Blockbusting can be accomplished anytime late May through early July, so if these dates don't suit your schedule or you prefer to bird individually, contact Spring to make other arrangements. Current atlas results and other atlas materials can be found at www.loudounwildlife.org/Bird_Atlas.htm.

Birds and Breeding Behaviors at Willowsford — Saturday, June 1, 8 a.m. Join us as we explore the woods and fields at Willowsford, identify birds, and talk about the relationships between the seasons and bird behavior. Please bring binoculars if you have them. This is a family-friendly event. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Jill Miller at jmiller@loudounwildlife.org.**

Ecology of Colonial Virginia — Tuesday, June 4, 7 p.m., Morven Park. What did Loudoun County look like in the early 18th century? How do we know? Dr. Emily Southgate will explain how ecologists use

18th century documents and fossils to reconstruct past landscapes, with examples specific to Loudoun County. After the presentation, she will lead a walk around Morven Park to point out remnants of past land uses that are still visible today. **Questions: Contact Christine Perdue at cperdue@rstarmail.com or 540-687-6726.**

How to Raise and Release Monarch Butterflies — Sunday, June 9, 2:00 p.m., Location TBD. Raising and releasing butterflies can be a great way to not only help this beautiful and imperiled butterfly and learn about its life cycle but also see this direct relationship between plants and animals. We'll share tips for finding eggs and caterpillars and for raising and releasing Monarchs through the summer. Rearing cages and the book *How to Raise Monarch Butterflies* will be available for purchase. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Nicole Hamilton at nhamilton@loudounwildlife.org.**

Butterfly Walk at Gibbens' farm — Saturday, June 15, 10:00 a.m. Join Nicole Hamilton for a free family butterfly walk at the Gibbens' farm southwest of Middleburg. We will investigate the native plant meadows and wetlands on this beautiful property and identify all the butterflies we can find; we will also observe the large colony of Purple Martins that live and feed in the meadows. If you own binoculars, please bring them. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Directions and questions: Contact Christine Perdue at cperdue@rstarmail.com or 540-687-6726.**

■ Continued on page 12

Birding the Blue Ridge Center

Fourth Saturdays
at 8 a.m.

April 27, May 25 & June 22



Join us on the monthly bird walk at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship (BRCES), a beautiful 900-acre preserve in northwestern Loudoun County. The property includes diverse wildlife habitats, including meadows, streams and heavily forested slopes. Meet at the Education Center; bring binoculars if you have them. BRCES is located just north of Neersville at 11661 Harpers Ferry Road (Rte 671); detailed directions at www.brces.org. **Questions: contact Joe Coleman at 540-554-2542 or jcoleman@loudounwildlife.org.**



■ *Programs & Field Trips, continued*

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Loudoun Field Trip — Sunday, June 23, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Rain date Sunday, June 30), Bles Park. Join Andy Rabin and Kevin Munroe for a fun and informative day of “dragon-hunting” in some of the best dragonfly and damselfly sites in the county. Learn how to catch, handle, identify and release these insects. Bring an insect net if you have one (some extra nets will be provided), a hat, sunscreen, snacks, water and binoculars. We may

be walking off-trail through tall vegetation so wear appropriate protection and be prepared for muddy conditions. Adults and interested children are welcome; come for part or all day. We will travel to two or three sites and stop at a restaurant for lunch. You may bring your own lunch if you prefer. Meet at Bles Park in Ashburn. Directions: www.loudoun.gov/Default.aspx?tabid=924. **Registration required: Sign Up Online. Questions: Contact Andy Rabin at stylurus@gmail.com.**

Questions?

For up-to-date information on our programs, check our web site at www.loudounwildlife.org.



Monarch in motion
Photo by Jim Clark



“*The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.*”

Rabindranath Tagore

“*I almost wish we were butterflies and liv'd but three summer days - three such days with you I could fill with more delight than fifty common years could ever contain.*”

John Keats



Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy “Bringing Back the Monarch”

- Join us for community programs, field trips and classes to learn more about the Monarch Butterfly
- Restore habitat by planting Monarch Waystations at your home, school, church or business
- Help us raise and release 2,013 Monarchs this summer and fall!
- Connect with communities in Mexico, the wintering grounds for our Monarchs

Help Keep the Magic Alive!



For more information visit www.loudounwildlife.org

2012 Central Loudoun Christmas Bird Count Exceeds Expectations!

by Joe Coleman

The 118 participants in the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's Central Loudoun CBC on Friday, December 28 found an astounding 106 species, the first time in the 16 years of the count more than 100 species were found! And the 35,065 individual birds were the second highest number of birds ever seen on the count. At the end of the day, tired birders met at Morven Park for the Tally Rally to celebrate a great day of birding and tell tales of what they had seen.

Our thanks go to birders and volunteers who made this great day possible, and the landowners who gave us permission to visit their properties.

Highlights:

Cackling Goose - the first for the count
Snow Goose - found on only about half of the counts
Tundra Swans - while found on less than half of the counts, several of the teams reported flocks flying over
Blue-winged Teal - found on only one other count
Red-breasted Merganser - found on only one other count
Merlin - found on only about half of the counts
Virginia Rails - not only were three found, they have been found on only three previous counts
American Woodcock - found on less than half the counts
Lesser Black-backed Gull - found on only one previous count
Long-eared Owl - seventh time found on this count
Owls - found all the local owls including one Barn Owl
Seven-woodpecker days - five teams managed to find all seven of our local woodpecker species
Red-headed Woodpecker - the 31 individuals found was a new high

Loggerhead Shrike - two of this state-threatened species were found

Horned Lark - found 330 of this species which is sometimes not even found on this count

Red-breasted Nuthatches - 17 were found, the second most ever found on this count and 16 more than last year

American Pipit - while not found on every count 214 were seen this year

Snow Bunting - found on Patton Turf Farm in Maryland and only the second year found on this count

Lapland Longspur - also found on Patton Turf Farm and not seen since 2002

Chipping sparrows - two found and only found on about half the counts

Rusty Blackbird - one found of this rapidly declining species

Common Redpoll - one found and last seen on this count in 1999

Pine Siskin - while not found every year, 24 were seen on this count.

To compare this year's count to previous years check out

www.loudounwildlife.org.

To compare the Central Loudoun CBC to other counts check out

www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/.

CBC participants:

Bob Abrams
 Barb Adatte
 Ana Arguelles
 Shannon Armstrong
 Ron Baker
 Gem Bingol
 Joanne Bradbury
 Bill Brown
 Merrill Brown
 Linda Chittum
 Rhonda Chocha
 Ike Clizbe
 Kent Clizbe
 Betsy Coffey-Chaudet
 Dan Colegrove
 Joe Coleman
 Karen Coleman
 Anita Colvard

Germaine Connolly
 Jamison Cramer
 Jeff Cramer
 Casey Crichton
 Donna Cummings
 Nathan Cummings
 Ellie Daley
 Phil Daley
 Kris Dennen
 Liz Dennison
 Kate Eldridge
 Elizabeth Evans
 Holly Flannery
 Helen Gansler
 Mary Ann Good
 Nicole Hamilton
 Dirck Harris
 Bruce Hill
 Teri Holland
 Bruce Johnson

Steve Johnson
 Liz Jones
 Stephen Jones
 Sharon Kearns
 Jodi Kenny
 Veronica LeCapra
 Jenne Leckert
 Mark Leckert
 Spring Ligi
 Colin Little
 Steve Little
 Janet Locklear
 Lorien MacAuley
 Stephen
 Bob MacDowell
 Karin MacDowell
 Alysoun Mahoney
 Steve Makranczy
 Andy Martin
 Teresa McAllister

Pamela McGroarty
 Laura McGranaghan
 Liam McGranaghan
 Kevin McKee
 Carole Miller
 Paul Miller
 Linda Millington
 Sharon Moffett
 Rusty Moran
 Carter Morrow
 Mr. Morrow
 Gary Myers
 Matthew Myers
 Jim Nelson
 Matt Orsie
 Cynthia Patience
 Ed Patten
 Grace Payne
 Rob Payne
 Suzanne Payne

Zach Payne
 Christine Perdue
 Michaela Peterson
 Paul Peterson
 Jonathan Plissner
 Sheryl Pollock
 Donna Quinn
 Frances Raskin
 Nancy Reaves
 Dori Rhodes
 Tim Ruhe
 Helen Ryan
 Del Sargent
 Judy Smith
 Ben Smith
 Turner Smith
 Sally Snidow
 Shannon Sollinger
 Emily Southgate
 Adam Stevenson

Karen Strick
 Kay Styer
 Norm Styer
 Russ Taylor
 Anna Urciolo
 David VanTassel
 Jenny Vick
 Suzanne Wade
 Anthony Wagner
 Warren Wagner
 Nancy Walker
 Scott Walker
 Carol White
 Chris White
 Marcia Weidner
 John Williamson
 Jeff Wneck
 Holly Wolcott
 Jane Yocum
 Angela Zapalla



Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
Photo by Joanne Pitcher



Common Milkweed
Photos by Nicole Hamilton

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

by Kerry Bzdyk

Common Milkweed – a fascinating plant with an unfortunate name. Often it is found growing in neglected sunny spots at the edge of farm fields. Rarely is this species cultivated in home gardens, but perhaps it should be! Monarch butterflies rely on it as a host plant and will lay their eggs exclusively on this plant where the caterpillars will feed and grow. As they do, they ingest an alkaloid (cardiac glycoside) that is toxic to humans, birds and other vertebrates. The adult Monarch stores these compounds in its wings and exoskeleton, rendering them unappetizing fare for birds and other animal predators. Predatory insects and spiders are unaffected by this toxin, so the caterpillars and butterflies are still vulnerable to these hunters.

Common Milkweed is found in the northeastern United States south to Virginia. It is a tall upright perennial which spreads by underground rhizomes or by seed. The mature plant can be one meter tall with thick strong stems that are covered with fine hairs. The stems and leaves exude a milky sap when broken (hence the common name). The leathery leaves are oblong to oval and opposite, and the flowers appear in rounded clusters (in June in our area), and are greenish purple to greenish white. The later fruits or pods are teardrop shaped and large (8 to 13 cm long). The pods, when dry, will open along one seam to release hundreds of seeds attached to silky hairs. The seeds are dispersed by the wind.

The flowers, on close inspection, are very intricate structures that rely on butterflies, bees and wasps for pollination. A myriad of these nectar-loving flyers can be found visiting a milkweed flower. The large bodied bees, such as carpenter bees and bumblebees, are especially fond of milkweed.

While the Monarch may be the best known insect to exclusively rely on milkweed, it is certainly not alone. If you examine a milkweed plant in the late summer, you might find another caterpillar feeding there. The Milkweed Tussock Moth also lays its eggs on milkweed, but unlike the Monarch this caterpillar lives in large groups that feed together. Two different strategies for survival are at play here. The Monarch will lay solitary eggs on many plants over a large area in hopes that many will find optimum conditions for survival, while the tussock moth will lay about fifty eggs on one plant, where they devastate the plant feeding on anything in their path (including unlucky Monarch caterpillars). They use a “strength in numbers” strategy to ensure that some will grow to adults and reproduce.

In addition to caterpillars there are: several species of milkweed beetles which live only on milkweed and feed on the stems and roots; milkweed bugs which eat milkweed plant matter, nectar and seeds; milkweed weevils, which bore a hole in the stem of plants to lay eggs; milkweed aphids, ants and many predator invertebrates, such as spiders, mantids and assassin bugs.

Visually, the Common Milkweed has something to offer in every season with its tall stature, bright leathery leaves, beautiful flowers and interesting seedpods. Give this common weed a space to thrive in your landscape, and then take the time to stop and observe the variety of life that calls it “home.”

Resources:

Rea, B., Oberhauser, K, and Quinn, M.A. 2010. *Milkweed Monarchs and More*, Bas Relief LLC
www.ppws.vt.edu/scott/weed_id/ascsy.htm
www.monarchwatch.org/milkweed/index.htm
plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_assy.pdf



Native, Pesticide-Free Plants Available at Local Nurseries

As part of the Monarch Campaign, we created a basic list of plants to be included in a Monarch Waystation. Four local Nurseries will be stocking them, so please stop on by and pay them a visit. Current members of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy can show their new membership card and receive a discount at these places.

Swamp Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata* *
 Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca* *
 Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*
 Blue Mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum*
 Joe-Pye Weed, hollow-stemmed, *Eupatoriadelphus fistulosus*
 Dense Blazing Star, *Liatris spicata*
 Wild Bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa*
 Narrow-leaved Mountain Mint, *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*
 Orange Coneflower, *Rudbeckia fulgida*
 Blackeyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*
 Narrow-leaved Goldenrod, *Solidago graminifolia* **
 Rough-stemmed Goldenrod, *Solidago rugosa* **
 Calico Aster, *Symphyotrichum lateriflorum*
 New York Ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*
 New England Aster, *Symphyotrichum novae angliae* **

* Necessary host plant for Monarch caterpillars

** Basic important nectar (food) plant for adult butterflies

Sources for non-cultivar, pesticide-free plants:

Catoctin Gardens

10 Catoctin Circle SE #B
 Leesburg, VA 20175
 703-669-1020

WildWood Nursery/Overbrook

36328 Bell Road
 Round Hill, VA 20141
 540-338-7190

Abernethy & Spencer

18035 Lincoln Road
 Purcellville, VA 20132
 540-338-9118

Petals & Hedges

40602 Charlestown Pike
 Paeonian Springs, VA 20129
 540-882-9113

Narrow-leaved Mountain Mint
 (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*)
 Photo by Jo Ann Pitcher ▶



◀ Bumblebee on Butterfly Weed
 (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
 Photo by Nicole Hamilton

Birdathon 2013!

May 4 - 12

Help raise money for bird conservation
 and have fun at the same time!

- All skill levels welcome.
- Great prizes for different age groups and skill levels.
- Bird on your own, form a team, or come on one of our walks for International Migratory Day, and to count species.
- A fun way to get outside and identify birds while raising money for our local birds and their habitats.

Join Us!



Two Ways to Participate

1) Be a Birdathoner

- Register to be a **birdathon** participant by signing up on the website.
- Gather pledges from friends, family, neighbors in support of helping birds.
- Select your count day (a 24-hour period between May 4 - 12).
- Visit our website to sign up for one of the bird walks for International Migratory Bird Day.
- Conduct your own count, identifying as many species as you can.
- Follow up with your sponsors to collect their pledges and mail them in to LWC by June 15.

2) Be a Sponsor

- Want to support the **Birdathon** but don't have time to gather pledges? Please consider making a pledge.
- You can make a flat contribution to the **birdathon** or sponsor a team and challenge them to find as many species as they can!

For more information - www.loudounwildlife.org



Worried About Insects on Your Milkweeds?

by Sally Snidow

One of the critical factors in the Monarch Butterfly's struggle to survive is an abundance of plentiful, pesticide-free milkweed (*Asclepias species*) on which to lay eggs. But Monarchs are not alone in their use of this beautiful plant family.

If you observe your milkweed plants carefully, you will undoubtedly notice some colorful insects on the leaves and stems. The most common of these are the large Milkweed Bugs (*Oncopeltus fasciatus*), Milkweed Leaf Beetles (*Labidomera clivicollis*), and Milkweed Aphids (*Aphis nerii*). As their common names imply, these insects feed on milkweed seed and plant juices thereby accumulating toxic glycosides in their bodies that protect them from predators.

Brightly colored Milkweed Bugs and Leaf Beetles use the same orange and black optical warning that Monarchs use to discourage predators. The little yellow aphids are not quite predator-proof and their numbers are kept in check by small wasps and ladybug beetles.

None of these creatures does serious damage to the plants or to the Monarch caterpillars, and are nothing to be concerned about. So why not leave them alone and see what happens? If you feel that your plants are being stressed by an unusually large insect population, just use a small brush to knock the insects off or shoot a strong water stream on them to wash them away. If using the water method, do it first thing in the morning when the sun can dry the leaves quickly to keep them healthy. Research shows that such mechanical methods are as effective as any pesticide and will not poison the plants for Monarch caterpillars as systemic chemical pesticides do. Be aware, however, when using these otherwise harmless methods, you may be knocking off Monarch eggs and small larvae. So be careful with hose or brush.

Whatever you do, do NOT use chemical pesticides. Neonicotinoids, the most common chemical pesticides in use today, can persist in the soil for 500 days or more, invading all parts of the plant. Studies show that after only one or two applications, plants grown in chemically treated soil can produce toxic leaves, stems, pollen, nectar, and transpiration droplets – everything an insect might use – for more than two growing seasons. Monarch caterpillars who try to live and grow on treated plants are doomed.

Use of pesticides kills not only the Monarchs, but also other valuable insects and pollinators, including honey bees. Extensive research has indicated such a strong connection between the use of these pesticides and Honey Bee Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) that several European countries, including France, Germany, and Italy, have restricted the use of agricultural neonicotinoids. And according to entomologist James Frazier of Penn State University, the amount of neonicotinoids used in homeowner products for backyard plants is 40 times greater than anything allowable in agricultural systems.

Now THAT's something to be worried about.



Milkweed Beetle
Photo by Larry Meade



Milkweed Bug
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Monarch caterpillars on Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) Photo by Liam McGranaghan



Why the Excitement About Spring Wildflowers?

by John DeMary

When European settlers sailed into the Chesapeake Bay they found a landscape dominated by dense forest and inhabited by a variety of native people. The interior forest seemed dark, dangerous and forbidding to the new arrivals, when actually it was a treasure chest of plants that provided food, medicine and other resources for the native people. These plants had evolved strategies to survive in an environment dominated by numerous species of gigantic deciduous trees.

Before Europeans began clearing the ancient forest, there were few breaks in the endless canopy, requiring plants of the forest to compete for light intensity, pollinators, moisture and limited resources.

Completing the floral cycle early enough to avoid the mature canopy exposed plants to a variety of weather extremes, but growing close to the ground, the ability to protect floral parts, and fast development were successful strategies. If conditions are not favorable for pollinators, plants like spring beauty and bloodroot remain tightly closed. When sunlight is available, floral parts can be warmed by the reflection from white petals. The flower of skunk cabbage actually generates an internal temperature much warmer than the surrounding air temperature, providing a winter haven for potential pollinators.

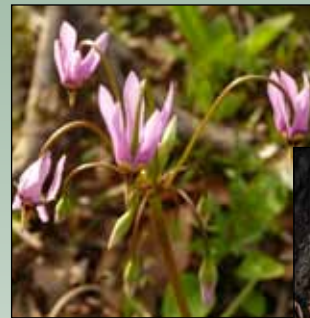
Numerous consecutive days when early spring temperatures are over 50° ensure a wide variety of pollinators will be attracted to the only floral show available. The bumblebee's ability to fly at lower temperatures than most other insects (41°) makes it the most useful pollinator for early spring wildflowers.

The lack of a rain-blocking tree canopy provides plants on the forest floor with an abundance of moisture to be absorbed by roots or captured on pubescent stems and leaves. The difference in moisture availability with a lacking canopy may be more important than light intensity to early spring wildflowers.

The scat of various mammals and birds carries seeds of many plants, but ants are the preferred distributors of fertile seeds for 30 percent of forest wildflowers. In a process called myrmecochory, the insects are recruited into service with a tasty morsel called an elaiosome, which is attached to the seed. Ants may carry seeds quite a distance before devouring the fat-filled elaiosomes and discarding the seeds, often safely underground.

Once flowers are pollinated and seeds are produced and distributed, it is time to become dormant for another season. Much of the photosynthetic energy produced during abundant sunlight has been stored underground in bulbs, rhizomes or corms, ensuring a new generation. These structures also serve as nutrient sinks, allowing plants to store high concentrations of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium needed for rapid development the following spring. As the mature canopy filters 90 percent of the available solar energy, mosses, ferns and tall broadleaf plants dominate the forest floor, while native wildflowers sleep and await another brief but spectacular display.

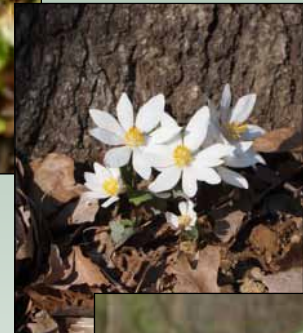
Why the excitement over spring wildflowers? I think Senegalese poet and conservationist Dioum Baba said it best:



Bloodroot (Sanguinaria canadensis)

Photo by John DeMary ▼

*Shooting Star ▲
(Dodecatheon meadia)*
Photo by Donna Quinn



*Pink Lady's Slipper
(Cypripedium acaule)*
Photo by John DeMary



Virginia Bluebells (Mertensia virginica)
Photo by Liam McGranaghan

"In the end,
We will conserve only what we love,
We will love only what we understand,
and we will understand only what we are taught."

Excitement for spring wildflowers is fostered by an understanding of the delicate balance maintained between the life of the flower and the life of its forest habitat. To know the flower you must know the forest, and to know the forest you must know the flower. This understanding might create a love that could help conserve a precious habitat in the end.

Abundant wildflowers can be found throughout the summer and fall, but these plants are hardier and can grow in acres of abundance, or cracks in pavement. Many thrive because of disturbance, and their blooming life is long and obvious. While the summer and fall plants flaunt their beauty in the long days of sunshine, a small corm, bulb or rhizome lies hidden beneath the forest floor, storing enough energy and nutrients for a brief but spectacular flash to reproduce another generation—therein lies the excitement of spring wildflowers.

References:

Marion Lobstein, "Spring Wildflower Ecological and Life Cycle Information," Northern Virginia Community College, Manassas, VA.



Nooks and Crannies:

The Life Cycle of a Monarch

by Meghan Meyers



Monarch egg on milkweed
Photo by Nicole Hamilton



Second instar
Photo by Emily Bzydk



Caterpillar eats
and grows until...
Photo by Nicole
Hamilton



Three chrysalids in various stages of
development. Photo by Donna Quinn



Emerging Monarch
Photo by Nicole Hamilton

In the span of 12 short months, four generations of butterflies will emerge: great-grand-parents, grandparents, parents, and offspring all in one year! The first few generations live just two to six weeks, dying shortly after mating and laying eggs. The fourth generation, the ones born in September and as late as October, are the exception – some will live as long as nine months and travel over 2,500 miles. Let's take a closer look!

The Egg

Female Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed plants, providing an immediate source of food for the larvae. Milkweed plants contain a milk-like substance which is toxic to other animals (but not other bugs which eagerly eat Monarch larvae). Monarchs eat milkweed to help protect them from being eaten by others.

The Larvae

Three to five days later, the egg hatches a larva, or caterpillar. The caterpillar feeds on milkweed leaves, pods, stems and flowers and rapidly grows until it reaches nearly 2,000 times its original size! Caterpillars literally grow right out of their own skin. Old, wrinkled skin peels away (molts) to reveal new skin. This occurs five times before they reach full size. Each molt is called an instar.

The Chrysalis

Upon reaching full size, the caterpillar will find a safe, sheltered twig or branch suitable for its transformation – or metamorphosis – into a butterfly. The caterpillar will hang from the underside of the twig, where it will shed its skin, revealing the chrysalis: a soft, jade-green shell with gold trim. This soft shell will slowly harden. Inside the caterpillar is undergoing an amazing transformation. About 10-12 days later, the chrysalis darkens and becomes transparent until we can see the delicate butterfly folded up inside. At this point, it won't be long before the butterfly cracks open the chrysalis and emerges.

The Migration

The life cycle of a Monarch is continuous throughout the summer – hatching, pupating, emerging, mating, laying eggs and dying – about every four to six weeks. Each generation seeks growing milkweed and nectar plants, drawing them further north or east. The generation which emerges in September and October looks similar to each of its predecessors, but is different. This generation emerges in a state of diapause. This simply means that it is not yet ready to mate and lay eggs.

The Monarch must make an incredible journey south to a place they have never been before to survive the winter. To conserve energy, they soar and glide on warm air currents for over 2,000 miles, stopping along the way to feed and refuel. Once they arrive at their wintering grounds in Mexico, they gather together in immense clusters to conserve energy, stay warm, and protect themselves against predators. After several months, the lengthening of days will signal to the Monarchs it is time to fly north and start the cycle again.

Monarchs face many perils – loss of milkweed plants due to increased use of pesticides and genetically modified crops (GMOs), parasitization, predators, disease, bad weather, and even being hit by cars. Read about what you can do to help Monarchs in this issue of the Habitat Herald. Most of all, cherish and protect the Monarchs seen in your yard by providing them with pesticide-free milkweed and other nectar plants.



Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary

Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary



Conservation begins at Home!

This area provided habitat for at least 10 Sanctuary Species. Sanctuary Species include native birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects needing help due to loss of habitat. View Sanctuary Species Fact Sheets and learn how to certify YOUR school, business, church or yard at:

www.loudounwildlife.org
www.audubonva.org

Participants whose property is certified have the option to display this sign

Audubon at Home Wildlife Sanctuary registration and certification is now a partnership project of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia. Certifying properties as wildlife sanctuaries is a volunteer implemented program. The core of the program is the "Healthy Yard Pledge" that stresses the following actions:

- Conservation and protection of water, e.g. using rain barrels
- Removal of invasive plants
- Replacement of non-native plants with native species
- Reduction or elimination of commercial fertilizers and pesticides
- Greater preservation of public and private natural areas

Eligible participants comprise not only homeowners, but also schools, churches, homeowner associations, parks, and other potentially sustainable wildlife habitats. Trained volunteer Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Ambassadors will visit with participants to identify opportunities to enhance their habitat. The commitment of participants and the outcome of their conservation actions are recognized by certifying their property when at least 10 of the 30 Sanctuary Species are observed - the aim is to "let the animals decide what makes a suitable habitat".

Native habitat for our flora and fauna is being steadily diminished by sprawling development in Loudoun County. While we strive to protect the remaining habitat, it's time to turn our attention to the conservation and restoration of native habitat in our own backyards and neighborhoods.

To learn more about becoming an ambassador or about having your property certified, contact Ann Garvey at agarvey@loudounwildlife.org, and visit www.loudounwildlife.org to get more information.

Please Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

I wish to become a member of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy:

- ☐ \$10 Student ☐ \$20 Individual ☐ \$30 Family ☐ \$200 Individual Lifetime
☐ \$300 Family Lifetime ☐ \$75 Corporate

I wish to make a donation to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, enclosed is my check in the amount of: _____
 (All contributions are tax deductible.)

Note: Memberships run from January 1 through December 31. (If you join or renew after September 1, your membership will run through the end of the following calendar year.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please make your check payable to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy and return with this form to:

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, P.O. Box 2088, Purcellville, VA 20134



Monarch on thistle
 Photo by Jim Clark



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Join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy or Renew Your Membership Today!

If you are not yet a member or if your membership has lapsed (see address label), we hope that you will join or renew today!

Your support makes a difference for Loudoun, our wildlife, and our habitats as we provide environmental programming, conduct habitat restoration projects, and work to protect and preserve habitat through advocacy and partnerships.

In addition to knowing that you are helping our mission, as a member you also receive a 10 percent discount at these local businesses: Catoctin Gardens (Leesburg), WildWood Landscape (Round Hill), Abernethy & Spencer Greenhouse (Lincoln), Petals & Hedges (Paeonian Springs), The Bird Feeder (Reston), and Audubon Naturalist Society (Chevy Chase, MD). Upon joining or renewing for 2013, you will receive a membership card and letter that provides more information.



*Monarch on Mexican Sunflower (Tithonia)
Photo by Deb Dramby*