



Monarch Facts

The monarch butterfly (*Daneus plexippus*) is an iconic species native to most areas across North America. About the weight of a paperclip, these flashy orange and black insects can fly up to 3,000 miles during their remarkable migration. In the fall, they migrate south to Mexico to wait out the winter, and then migrate north to the U.S. and Canada in the spring to begin breeding. Monarch caterpillars feed solely on milkweed (*Asclepias*) plants, while the adult butterflies can feed on nectar from a variety of plants, including milkweed. The adult butterflies are crucial pollinators, and many agricultural crops rely heavily on insect pollinators to generate produce.



The monarch population has declined 90% in the past several decades. In addition to the ever present threats of natural predators, parasites and disease, monarchs have been losing vast areas of habitat to land development and agriculture. Increased prevalence of herbicide tolerant crops and the accompanying rise in pesticide use has had devastating effects on milkweed, and monarchs along with it. Invasive species crowd out milkweed, and sometimes cause monarchs to lay their eggs in the wrong places. Changing climate and its extreme weather events also pose a significant threat to the survival of monarchs and their host plants.



Luckily, there is much that can be done to protect the monarchs! For example, governments can provide pollinator habitat on publicly owned land, farmers can follow pollinator-friendly best management practices on their land, schools can incorporate monarch education and conservation into their studies and projects, and individuals can make an impact in a variety of ways, including planting native pollinator gardens and participating in 'citizen science' efforts to monitor monarch populations. For more information on how everyone from businesses to school children can help save the monarch, read the **DEP's New Jersey Monarch Butterfly Conservation Guide**.