

Monarch Butterfly

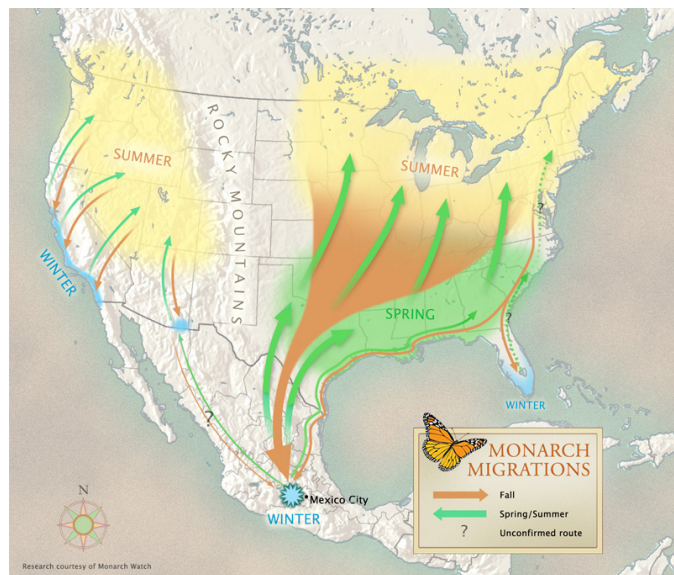
(*Danaus Plexippus*)



Native throughout North America, Monarch Butterflies are well known for their **annual migration**. Butterflies that breed west of the Rocky Mountains often travel to California for the winter, while butterflies that breed east of the Rocky Mountains migrate south to Mexico. Also known for their **distinctive life-cycle**, the Monarch feeds on milkweed through its larval stages, while adult Monarchs expand their diets to include many blooming plants.

Current Standing

- In December of 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is set to make its decision to list the Monarch Butterfly on the **Endangered Species Act**. Doing so would dramatically increase public funding for conservation efforts and provide ongoing efforts with additional resources.



- A recent study by WWF found that the 2019 wintering season brought a potential **53% decrease in the eastern population** of Monarch Butterflies compared to the 2018 season.
- The western population of Monarchs was estimated to be around **30,000 individuals in 2019**, down from 200,000 in 2017, and over 1 million in 1990.

Threats

- A recent **decline in milkweed** has resulted from mowing and herbicide usage in areas where the plant was once prevalent. Monarch Butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed, making the plant's decline detrimental to the species.

- The Monarch's life cycle is extremely sensitive to temperature changes. **Unpredictable weather patterns resulting from climate change** can disrupt the butterfly's biological processes such as knowing when to reproduce and migrate.



- Deforestation in the wintering areas of Mexico reduces the butterfly's access to vital resources during the winter months.

Importance of Monarch Butterflies

- Aside from being an **effective pollinator**, which plays a crucial role in preserving many ecosystems, the Monarch Butterfly has **unique cultural ties** as one of North America's most recognizable species. Its distinct life cycle and migratory patterns have made it a flagship species used for **education** about wildlife, conservation, and the environment more broadly across the continent.

Conservation Strategies

- While waiting for policy action, localized conservation efforts will be key to slowing the decline of the Monarch Butterflies population. Cities across the country are committing to expanding the Monarch's habitat by **planting milkweed and nectarous flowers**.