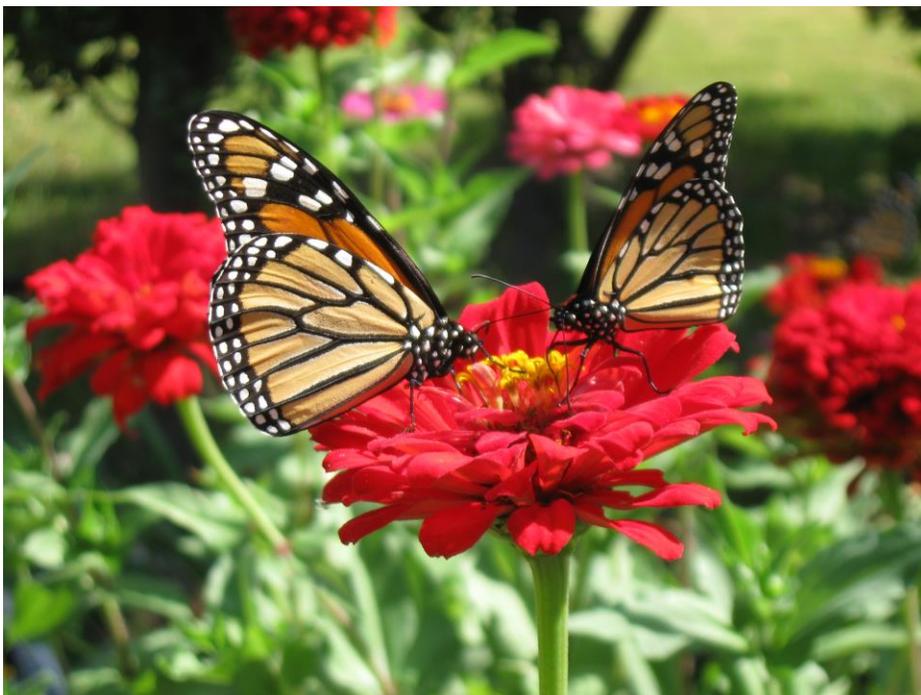


And you thought the migration of the Sandhill crane was amazing! How familiar are you with the miraculous migration of the monarch butterfly?

Last July, I hosted a meeting called *Milkweed Watch* presented by three UNL entomologists. The purpose of the program was to create public awareness of the milkweed plant and its importance to the lives of many insects, including the monarch butterfly. For this marvelous species of butterfly, the milkweed plant is essential for its very existence.



Since that meeting, my vigil for milkweed and monarchs has been on high alert. All summer I checked our milkweed plants for monarch eggs or larvae and observed the flower borders for adult butterflies. On occasion, I would see an adult butterfly or two, but their

presence was rare. All that has recently changed. Of late, I've seen dozens of monarch butterflies flying about and feeding on our flowers. They seem to gravitate mostly to our zinnias and asters which are now in full bloom.

It's that time of year for the monarchs annual fall migratory flight back to the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico. There, adult monarch butterflies spend their winter. Unlike other species of butterflies that can overwinter as pupae here in Nebraska and areas much farther north, monarchs cannot survive the cold. They must migrate. Furthermore, they've been doing this for perhaps millions of years.

Monarch butterflies possess an amazing skill. Without any guidance, these beautiful, yet seemingly fragile, insects inherently know how, when and where to migrate, traveling northward in the spring and then south again for the winter. As far as I know, the monarch is the only butterfly that makes this two-way migration.

Interestingly, it takes four generations to make this two-way, year-long trek. In the spring, it takes three generations before the monarch butterfly reaches its northern-most destination. It's the fourth generation that we



are seeing now. This generation lives the longest. Unlike their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents that live only for a month or two, the fourth generation lives upwards to eight months traveling the continents in the fall eventually reaching their winter home. In order for this fourth generation to successfully reach their winter destination, often over a thousand miles, they must stop, rest and feed along the way.

In July when I wrote about the milkweed plant and its importance to the survival of the monarch, I encouraged the planting of milkweeds. During the egg, larvae and chrysalis stage of the monarch, the milkweed is an essential food source for the butterfly's survival. However, now that the fall monarch migration is underway, having late summer blooming flowers rich in nectar to feed these weary travelers is also crucial. If you have also been fortunate to witness these winged wanderers stopping by your yard, chances are you have the right food source. If not, some excellent examples to plant for next year might include all varieties of asters, zinnias, all varieties of milkweeds, goldenrod, coreopsis, cone flower, monarda, Joe Pye weed, and sneeze weed.

To learn more about this marvelous creature and its amazing habits, I suggest you log onto the website www.monarchwatch.org. Sadly, the monarch butterfly and its migration are threatened. By accessing this website, you can learn ways to help save the monarch. You might also consider downloading the free app called *MonarchSOS* on your cell phone. It, too, is loaded with wonderful information about this beautiful creature now on its winged flight.

Like the migration of the Sandhill crane, the migration of the monarch butterfly is amazing.