



Updates from the Trail: August 2022

Species spotlight:

Monarch Butterfly

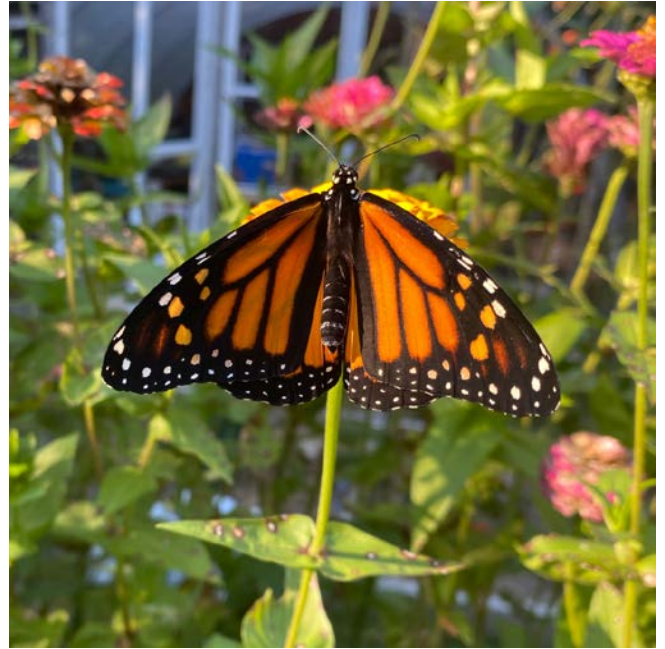
(*Danaus plexippus*) by Lissy Perna

Monarch butterflies are easily identifiable by their large size and vibrant orange and black wings. The Eddy Sisters property is a prime location for watching these brilliant butterflies. You may observe monarchs pollinating while consuming nectar from the various wildflowers in the meadow and adult female monarchs laying eggs on the underside of the green leaves of the milkweed plants. The milkweed plant is the monarch's host plant, meaning it is the only place where they will deposit their eggs, as it is the sole food source for a newly hatched larvae or caterpillar.

The metamorphosis that takes place during the life of a monarch is fascinating. A monarch caterpillar egg is minuscule, about the size of a pencil tip. About four days after being laid, the larvae will emerge and consume the eggshell as its first meal. The caterpillar will continue to eat, grow, and shed its skin by molting. It will molt four to five times in stages called instars before it is ready to form a chrysalis. The chrysalis, a smooth jade-colored capsule with tiny glinting gold flecks, will hang from a nearby branch or stable object until the butterfly emerges or ecloses about ten to fourteen days later.

You may have recently heard that the migratory monarch butterfly has been added to the "red list" as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN. This decline is due to various factors, including climate change and widespread habitat destruction. Here are ways that you can help the monarch population on a small-scale level:

1. Plant native milkweed: this plant is crucial to the survival of the monarchs. On Cape Cod, swamp, whorled, common, and butterfly milkweed are all native species.
2. Plant a nectar-rich, native, wildflowers. Adult monarchs rely on nectar-rich flowers for food, so planting a variety of flowers that bloom throughout the summer and fall ensures that there are food sources when monarchs need them. You can find a list of flowers for monarchs from the [Xerces Society here](#).
3. Stop using harmful pesticides on your property. Herbicides like glyphosate can kill non-target plants like milkweeds while the insecticides that the mosquito control companies pump into the air kill all insects, including monarch caterpillars
4. Work towards conserving undeveloped land and the crucial ecosystems in which these butterflies thrive.



*A female monarch butterfly feeding on the nectar of a zinnia.
Photo by Lissy Perna.*



A monarch caterpillar on its host plant, the common milkweed. Photo taken at the Eddy Sisters property by Lissy Perna.