



My Month as a Monarch Mama

By Carol Gaham

I became a Monarch mom on August 15, 2015. Because of the unusually wet summer, the mosquitoes at my house seemed to have grown as big as turkeys and as mean as copperheads, so I did not venture out too often for my normal regimen of walking around the yard to see what was new. But this day was sunny and warm, so I thought I would “test the waters” and see how far I could get. As I was looking at my stand of milkweed, I suddenly saw it: A Monarch caterpillar!

My husband, long past being surprised at anything he sees when he hears me say, “Come look! Come look!” quietly stopped what he was doing and walked around the side of the house to see what I had found this time. As he looked at the critter I was pointing at, he quietly said, “What is it?” I excitedly said, “It’s a Monarch caterpillar!” He said, “Cool,” and went back to what he was doing.

Now that I had discovered this beautiful creature, I had to make a decision. I knew these guys are a very important part of the ecosystem and we need to help in any way we can, so I had to decide if I needed to adopt this guy or leave him to nature’s care. So, after making my decision, I did what any new mom would do: I took pictures of my new baby and posted them on Facebook. And, of course, I sent the pictures to Jeff Ormiston.

Off to the internet I went to figure out what I needed to do to keep my caterpillar safe. I made a nursery for my little ward out of a flower vase. By this time, I was mentally kicking myself for not signing up for Jeff’s Monarch class. I got all done and was thinking that it really should have a lid of some kind on it, and immediately thought of my favorite heroine, Scarlett O’Hara, and declared, “I’ll think about that tomorrow.” The next day, as I pondered how to keep my caterpillar safe, I received an email from heaven (ok, it was from Jeff). The email said two things: “LOOK FOR MORE”, and “Come to my class today”. A huge sigh of relief came over me as I thought...Thank goodness. Parenting class.

By the time I got to parenting class, my family had grown to five caterpillars in various instar stages. Jeff asked me about my nursery. I told him, and he just smiled and gave me proper nursery equipment. I was set.

As I was transferring my babies into their new nurseries, one of them fell from its leaf and was swinging by a silken thread. As I gently put him back on his leaf, I thought, “I didn’t know they did that!” The other thing I discovered is that I actually had 7 caterpillars instead of five. I told them that they were just going to have to bunk together and instructed them not to fight or eat each other.

I learned that Monarch caterpillars do two things very well. The first thing is eat. My growing family became voracious eaters. I worried for a while that I was going to have to roam the roads foraging for milkweed because I didn’t know if I would have enough to feed them. But a mom’s gotta do what a mom’s gotta do, right?

The second thing caterpillars do is produce frass. A whole lot of frass. Goodness.

I watched my caterpillars go through several rites of passage. The first one is going from an egg to a caterpillar, then to increasingly bigger caterpillar stages (instars). Finally, they had to leave the safety of their leaves and make a “J” with their bodies. They evidently turn into teenagers at this stage, because they curl up in a chrysalis (slam the door shut), and hole up in there for what seems like forever (10-15 days). At least there are no more dirty rooms to clean up for a while, right? So, now I had caterpillars who had withdrawn from society, and they seemed to have copped a bit of an attitude. They wove a tiny golden halo around the top of their chrysalis proclaiming their royalty. How beautiful!

So, one at a time, my beautiful caterpillars went through this ritual. And one by one, they hatched into sleek, powerful, flying machines. Then it was time for the next rite of passage: Graduation. I had sent away to MonarchWatch.org to get their tiny diplomas, so I was ready. As I attached the little tag to each one’s wing I felt so proud! More pictures on Facebook!

Then came the hardest part: That final rite of passage. Every parent hears it...”There’s this party going on at the end of October down in Mexico. It’s a really big deal, and if I don’t go now, I’ll never get another chance. Everyone is going!” What is a parent to do? So, I take a deep breath and say to my beautiful butterfly babies, one by one, “You are an adult now and must make your own way. Eat right, stay warm, be careful, and don’t get lost”. And I set them free.

I am an empty nester now. My nursery containers are all scrubbed and put away and life is back to normal. I think about my butterflies often and am sad that they have left, but am heartened by all the interest they received on my Facebook page. Perhaps I raised awareness just a bit for these magnificent creatures. And I smile and think that maybe, just maybe, my butterflies will each meet someone special in Mexico, and in about 9 months or so...I’ll be a Monarch Grandma.



Monarch Parasites

By Julie Henricks

Each August, our monarch butterflies begin their annual migration. Unlike previous broods from earlier in the summer, this “magic” generation is uninterested in mating but rather is focused only on heading south. We might wonder how such delicate creatures can survive the many perils they will encounter on their way to Mexico: rainstorms, headwinds, and highway crossings, to name a few. But those that have survived to adulthood already have faced down a host of enemies, some of them so sinister that a two-thousand-mile flight may not seem so bad.

Monarch eggs are inconspicuous, resembling both tiny beads of milkweed sap and immature *Aphis nerii*, the yellowish aphids that appear on milkweed plants in late spring.

Despite their small size and camouflaged appearance, however, the eggs are targeted by a number of predators. Ants which tend the aphids consume monarch eggs, as do red velvet mites. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae may be preyed upon by a variety of spiders, and by insects such as assassin bugs, lady beetle larvae, lacewings, and paper wasps, the latter of which feed the monarch caterpillars to their developing young. The monarchs may fall victim to brachonid wasps or tachinid flies as well, both of which lay eggs on the caterpillars; the parasitoids' young develop inside the monarch and eventually kill it.

Pseudomonas bacteria and the *Nuclear polyhedrosis* virus are known to infect monarchs in the wild, but they also present problems for those who raise caterpillars at home. If the enclosure used to house the monarchs is not kept clean and dry, the likelihood of infection by these organisms greatly increases. A protozoan called *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, or "O.e.", is another menace. It reproduces by means of spores that are carried on the butterfly's scales. If a monarch is heavily infected with O.e., it may not develop into a normal adult; however, lower concentrations of the organism permit the butterfly to live and reproduce, though often with a shorter lifespan. The spores are spread to the eggs as they are laid by an infected female, and thus to a new generation of caterpillars.

Information for this article was obtained from the following books and websites:

Milkweed, Monarchs, and More: A Field Guide to the Invertebrate Community in the Milkweed Patch by Ba Rea, Karen Oberhauser, and Michael A. Quinn; copyright 2003 by Bas Relief, LLC, Union, WV.

The Monarch Butterfly: Biology and Conservation, edited by Karen S. Oberhauser and Michelle J. Solensky, copyright 2004 by Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

www.learnaboutmonarchs.com

<http://monarchlab.org/biology-and-research/biology-and-natural-history/parasites-natural-enemies>

www.monarchparasites.org

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/biology/control.htm>

To read about interesting research on O.e. and monarchs, check out this website:

<http://esciencecommons.blogspot.com/2010/10/monarch-butterfly-medicine-kit.html>.



Natural Selection at Work: by Cynthia Powers

Did you know there are white monarchs? Very rare, these have been found in Hawaii and seem to be increasing. It's a recessive trait, meaning both parents have to be white. Apparently, two bird species called Bulbuls, introduced from India, have learned to eat the orange monarchs. So natural selection has favored the white phenotype. In Hawaii, monarchs eat a plant called crown flower, in the milkweed family, but not as toxic. Or maybe the bulbuls are just resistant! I'd be willing to bet that the monarchs of Hawaii don't migrate: natural selection would be pretty harsh to any that tried it!

Weather Report from Venus:

900 degrees, cloudy, 100% chance of sulfuric acid rain.

It's a privilege to live in Indiana!



Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids

By Pam George

Nature Forecasters: Fact or Fable?

Old Man Winter is just around the corner! Wondering how harsh the winter winds will be is a pastime as old as farming. Years ago, before the invention of our modern-day weather forecasting instruments, and of course “text-casting, a farmer had to look to Mother Nature to help predict the bitter forces of nature. Their keen observation skills led to a growing list of nature forecasters that are often published in, of course, the *Farmers’ Almanac*.

Here are some of the all-time favorites:

If ant hills are high in July, winter will be snowy.

For every fog in August, there will be a snowfall in winter.

When leaves fall early, fall and winter will be mild. When leaves fall late, winter will be severe.

Squirrels gathering nuts in a flurry will cause snow to gather in a hurry. And when squirrels’ tails are very bushy, that’s a sign of a tough winter to come.

Much rain in October, much wind in December.

If corn husks are thick and tight, a tough winter is ahead. The same applies for apple skins. And when onion skins are very thin, a mild winter is coming in. But if onion skins are thick and tough, the coming winter will be cold and rough.

When bees build their nests high in the trees, they expect a hard winter.

As high as the weeds grow, so will the bank of snow.

If Christmas is green, Easter will be white.

If there’s thunder during Christmas week, the winter will be anything but meek.

Early arrival of crickets on the hearth means more fires to build.

Spiders spinning larger than usual webs and sneaking inside your house means a winter to fear.

“See how high the hornet’s nest, ‘twill tell how high the snow will rest”

Frequent halos or rings around sun or moon forecast numerous snow falls.



Now, here’s one I think I’ll try:

Persimmon seeds are thought to forecast what type of winter we will have. Pick a persimmon that has been locally grown, carefully cut the seeds open lengthwise. If you see a spoon-shaped pattern which represents a shovel, there’s lots of heavy, wet snow to come. A knife shape signals a cold, icy winter with cutting winds. But if a fork is visible, it means a generally mild winter with only light powdery snow.

Should we really believe these handed-down tales?

For instance, consider the woolly bear caterpillar (Isabella tiger moth). Weather lore says that checking the black bands of the caterpillar can predict how severe the upcoming winter will be. The wider a woolly bear’s middle brown section, the milder the winter we may have. If there is more black than brown, the upcoming winter could prove quite harsh.

However, scientists explain that a woolly bear caterpillar sheds its outer layer up to six times before reaching adult size. Each time it molts, it becomes less black and more reddish. In other words, older caterpillars mean milder winters?

Well anyway, sharpen up those observation skills and see how many of nature’s forecasters ring true. Even if they are all just fables, think of the fun you’ll have scurrying around Fox Island this winter.



Younger? / Older?



Are you wondering what is coming up at Fox Island, and maybe at Metea County Park as well? Check www.allencountyparks.org, and click on “Wild Grapevine” newsletter.

Lots of programs for all ages. **Most require pre-registration** and a small fee. To pre-register call 449-3180.

These are the ones submitted by press time:

Tai Chi with Sandy Gebhard, Wed. evenings 6-7. There’s still time to drop in for just \$8 per session. Runs until Nov. 11 in the Dulin Building.

Birdwatching with Stockbridge Audubon, Oct. 10 at 8:30 a.m. Free with park admission; meet at the Dulin Building. Beginners welcome.

Allen County Trailblazers Guided Hike, Oct. 24 Sat. at 1 p.m.

Night Hike, Oct. 24 Sat. 7-8:30 p.m. Test your night vision on this moonless night. Another night hike on Nov. 21, Saturday 6-7:30.

Turkey Trot 5k Trail Run: Nov. 21 Sat . Info at michaelyann52@yahoo.com; preregister at runrace.net.

Lay of the Land, Way of the Wind Nov. 21 Sat. 2-4. Hike 2 miles with Ron Z. and observe effects of geology and wind, now that the leaves are down.

Cross Country Ski Clinics, Dec. 19 Sat. 10-noon. Also Jan. 9, 10-12. Cost \$8; less if bringing own equipment. Leave phone no. and shoe size when pre-registering by 12/14 or 1/4.

Owl Prowls, Dec. 19 and Jan. 9, Saturdays 5:30-7:30. Start indoors, but dress for the weather!



Check the park website for many preschool programs.

Special Training for Trail Guides and Indiana Master Naturalist Alumni: Dec. 2, Wed. 9-12 : “Holding Wildlife” with Beth Woods.

Scrapbooking with Natalie: Nov. 20, 6 p.m.-midnight! Cost \$10.

And here’s a deal: Work for 6 hours eradicating invasive honeysuckle, and win a free park pass! Oct. 27 and 28, 10-4. Call Natalie for info.



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The **Fox Island Alliance** is a volunteer not-for-profit organization. Its purposes are to help preserve the natural features of Fox Island County Park, to assist its orderly development as a nature preserve, to raise funds to facilitate its development, to promote Fox Island's use as an educational center, and to coordinate volunteer efforts.

MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE ON MARCH 31. CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL TO BE SURE.

Use the application to the right and check "Renewal"

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