

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

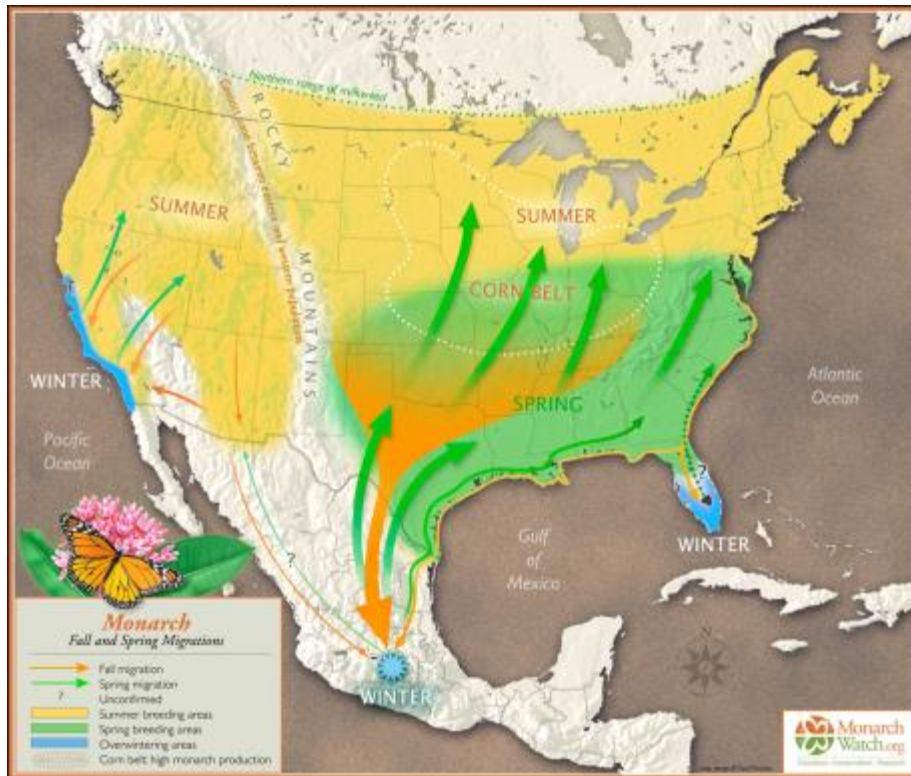
I felt a little desperate as, just about a year ago I wrote to you of the precipitous 90% drop in the population of monarch butterflies. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140918191451-27791839-of-milkweed-and-monarchs> I told you I refused to believe it was too late – even as my writing was shadowed by dozens of other extirpations; the well-known, like passenger pigeons who once darkened the skies of this continent and creatures little talked about like the richly-coated sea mink who once scrambled along rocky Atlantic shores.

I assured you, “You have the power to save a species. All it takes is action.” And I laid out recipes for how we as individuals, managers and company owners, Sunday school teachers and farmers could make a difference - namely by planting more milkweed. Yet even as I wrote those words I wondered if they would catch with minds and hands responding or would this be a lonely call for help?

Today, as monarchs hang upside down in chrysalises from screen enclosures on my kitchen counter, I still feel desperate – but not alone. You have been answering – as individuals, as businesses and organizations. More importantly, my voice and hands have been among thousands working diligently to save this winsome, gossamer creature.

Labor Day’s issue of Morning Edition on National Public Radio accompanied my laundry duties this long weekend. Renee Montagne’s pleasant voice suddenly became more distinct as she announced a local interview which held a familiar name – the Missouri Prairie Foundation(MPF). <http://www.npr.org/2015/09/07/438228441/to-save-monarch-butterflies-gardeners-plant-more-milkweed> I stopped folding.

It was the latest effort to get the word out – but not simply from the newsletter of a northern Missouri writer and biomimicry teacher. Ms. Montagne’s voice reached across the nation as she introduced our local public radio producer who, in turn, introduced MPF’s Executive Director, Carol Davit. Although Carol was speaking from the heart of the North American monarch migration, this Labor Day our message of milkweed planting was expanded from the central states we serve clear across the monarch’s North American pathway. I suppose you could say we are the buckle of the North American Butterfly Belt.



Adapted from Wassenaar LI, Hobson KA PNAS 1998;95:15436---15439

She was pointing out a monarch caterpillar munching on his sole food source – milkweed. In this case, it was swamp or marsh milkweed <http://grownative.org/plant-picker/plant/marsh-milkweed/> but it’s important to note that common milkweed <http://grownative.org/plant-picker/plant/common-milkweed/> and butterfly milkweed <http://grownative.org/plant-picker/plant/butterfly-milkweed/> are just as happy to host these fleeting, flying friends.

Monarchs aren’t the only species of butterflies worth helping. In fact, there are an array of butterflies <http://grownative.org/native-plant-info/other-plant-lists/best-natives-for-butterflies-2/> and other pollinators which deserve our help and support. Among other things, these and an array of fellow pollinators are responsible for a third of the food we eat <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/>, but they rely on far more than our gardens. In fact, as partner Chip Taylor advised on the same radio show, we need 20 million acres of habitat restoration – a little larger than the area of South Carolina - simply for the monarch’s migration to remain intact.

This is going to require all our backyard efforts, city and corporate campus plantings and field edge habitat on farms. But “rehab” won’t be achieved without also attending to large-scale land preservation of the sort MPF provides through the purchase and management of native grasslands. Currently owning and/or managing well over 3,000 acres, MPF supports many lesser known and recognized pollinators on Midwestern prairies who do their work even better than the monarchs.

Beyond pollinators, these prairie lands host plants that may become key drought-resistant cover crops. They're home to native hawks and flashes of color we recognize as songbirds on their own migrations. There are the lesser known but no less deserving creatures like the bugle sprite, summer azure and the fiercely named armed snaggletooth who count these lands as home. In our own gardens we must purposefully plant specific species to aid the cause. But prairies provide exactly the conditions needed to play host to a biodiverse array of plants and animals which, without the benefit of these larger landscapes, could go the way of the less fortunate creatures and plants of the past.

In the name of the monarch we have strengthened our stance and bent our backs toward the salvation of a winged metaphor for childhood innocence and learning. Although there are those who are perhaps better at the job of spreading pollen, there is no species better known and more beloved for its splash of color in the sky and endurance on its 2,500 mile journey.

So, thank you for planting your milkweed and telling others to do so. Thank you for delaying field mowing until their autumn flights are finished. Thank you for supporting the Missouri Prairie Foundation in its work to acquire and protect those larger prairie ecosystems. Thank you for answering the call in the name of prairie species one and all.

Best to you and our big earth too,

Margo

Margo Farnsworth
Screendoor Consulting
<http://screendoorconsulting.com/>
[615.478.4889](tel:615.478.4889)

Give good people good information and they'll do good things.

(If you've just received this single newsletter, it may be because I thought you'd be interested in this particular subject. You may or may not get others. If you want on my list regularly, e-mail me. If you want off my list, e-mail me. Thanks!)