

## Monarch Butterflies



Have you ever seen a butterfly with orange, white, and black markings? That may have been a monarch butterfly! Monarch butterflies are beautiful. They are also important.

Monarch butterflies often can be found near flowers. They feed on the nectar those flowers make. While they go from flower to flower eating nectar, they also pollinate the flowers. Because of this, those flowers can grow new seeds. Then those seeds can grow into new plants! So monarch butterflies are important pollinators.

Many monarch butterflies live in the United States and Canada. But they make a very special trip in the winter. The butterflies that are born late in the summer travel to Mexico and Southern California. That trip can be up to 3,000 miles long! That's a far way to go for an insect. The butterflies make this trip to get away from the cold weather. They go to the same forests every

year. Some scientists say that up to a billion butterflies go to the mountain forests of Mexico each year!

The number of monarch butterflies has gone down a lot over the past twenty years. Problems in their environment can make it hard for them to survive. For example, there has been a loss of milkweed plants. Those are the plants that monarch butterflies lay eggs on. Cities and farms have gotten rid of a lot of milkweed. Hot, dry weather has hurt milkweed, too. All of this hurts the monarch butterflies.

The forests of Mexico where butterflies go for the winter have also been shrinking. People have cut down parts of the forest. Changing weather has hurt the forest as well. This puts the butterflies at risk.