

Montana  Pollinator  
Education Project  
**Monarch  
Butterfly**



William Mamer, Shutterstock



Background: Milkweed  
Photo courtesy of ©William M.  
Ciesla, Forest Health Management  
International, Bugwood.org

**native pollinator**

# Monarch Butterfly

## Danajus plexippus

Genus: **Danaus** Family: **Nymphalidae**

Orange and brown/black

8.9 - 10.2 cm wingspan

males and females vary in color

Monarch butterflies belong to a family that is sometimes called “brush-footed” because of all the hair on their shortened forelegs. The males and females vary slightly in color. The male has a black spot on each hind wing which releases a scent to attract females.

Monarchs are known for their migration, which can take them from Canada to Mexico. Each year after migrating north monarchs seek out milkweed; this is the only plant that contains all of the materials that larvae need to mature. After the larvae matures the monarch feeds on nectar from many type of plants.



Monarch larvae

The monarch completes this lifecycle about 5 times each year; the adults live only about 5 weeks. Only the final group of larvae survives to migrate, this group lives about 8 months. The final group must make the trip as far south as Mexico and then back north in the spring to begin the monarch lifecycle all over again.

In western Montana the monarchs will likely travel to the San Diego area to overwinter. From the time the egg is laid until metamorphosis is complete is about one month. The milkweed is harmless to monarchs but toxic to predators. Monarchs bright orange color serves as a warning to predators about their toxic nature. Other butterflies like the painted lady mimic this color for safety.



Black spot of the male monarch



Monarch tagged to study migration