

### The Monarchs are Coming! The Monarchs are Coming!

Written by: Diane Hewlett-Lowrie, NJ State Park Service Naturalist

Last Fall, you might have said adios to a few spectacular orange and black butterflies as they headed south to spend the winter. This spring, you could be welcoming back their great, great ‘grandchildren.’

The monarch butterfly (*Daneus plexippus*) has a remarkable lifecycle - spanning generations. The generation born at the end of the summer/early fall has the most difficult, but spectacular, lifespan.

Known as the “Methuselah Generation” because it is the longest-lived, these butterflies migrate over 2,000 miles to Mexico where they join up with millions of monarchs from all over the continental US to overwinter – clustering together on trees in the cool, dry mountains of central Mexico.

In the spring, they begin to journey north, stopping, mating, and laying eggs on milkweed plants in southeastern states. After laying their eggs, these adults die, but their offspring continue the journey to a variety of northern breeding grounds, including New Jersey. Once there, there can be 2 or 3 more generations, with the adults of late summer being the ones that will migrate to Mexico for the winter.

Monarch butterfly numbers have been declining over the past two decades, but you can help!



Monarch nectaring on Goldenrod



Butterfly weed

#### WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

In your own backyard, grow a variety of native flowers, making sure there are early, mid-season and late blooming species. Goldenrod is very late blooming and valuable source of fuel for the migrating generation. Avoid insecticides. **PLANT MILKWEED!** Milkweed is the only plant that monarch caterpillars will eat and therefore the only plant that monarchs lay their eggs on. Choose a NJ native variety, like butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) or swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*).