

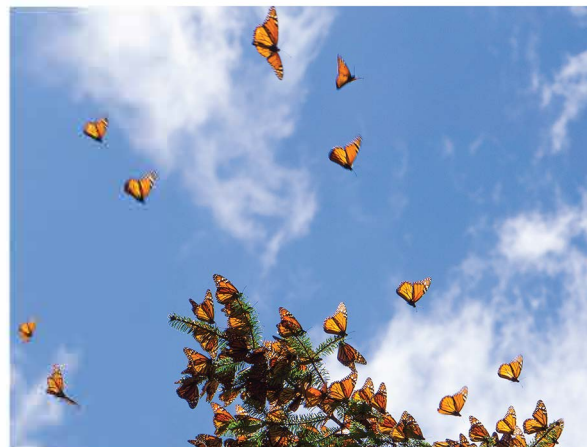
Mysterious Monarchs

Western Monarch butterflies are amazing creatures that make a spectacular annual migration of up to 1,500 miles to overwinter in forested groves along the coast of California. Each spring, the butterflies fan out across the West to lay their eggs on milkweed and drink nectar from flowers.

Monarch Migration

Around late winter, Monarchs begin to leave their overwintering sites and reproduce. Several subsequent generations migrate inland until late summer. The last generation then migrates back to the coast. This *super generation* lives eight times longer and travels ten times farther than the prior generations.

Since these monarchs were born inland, how they find their way to the coast remains a mystery!



Monarchs conserve energy during flight by soaring in updrafts of warm air called **thermals**. Once at the top of thermals, they glide toward their destination, averaging 25 to 30 miles per day. **Impressive for an insect the weight of a paperclip!**



On the Brink of Extinction

Sadly, the Western Monarch butterfly population drastically declined during 2020, reaching the lowest level ever recorded: less than 1% of historic populations.

Why the Shocking Decline?

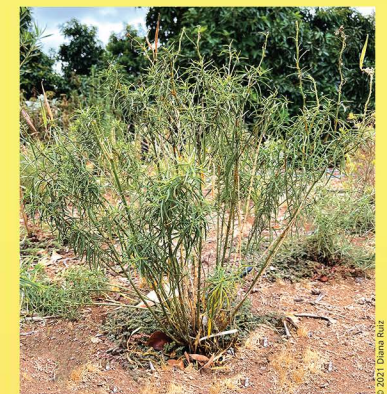
Loss of Native Milkweed: Milkweed is the only food source for the Monarch caterpillar, and much of it has been destroyed due to land being converted from habitat to agricultural or urban use.

Pesticide Exposure: Monarchs are weakened and killed unintentionally by toxic weed and insect killers.

Drought and Climate Change impact milkweed growth and habitat availability.

Disease: Many nurseries sell tropical milkweed which does not go dormant in winter. This tropical milkweed can host a parasite called *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, or "OE" that weakens and kills Monarchs.

Coastal Habitat Loss: Coastal overwintering sites have been degraded or developed, leaving few trees that provide for quality roosting sites.



Narrow Leaf Milkweed
Asclepias fascicularis



Monarchs need tall trees like Eucalyptus, Monterey pine, and Cypress that provide filtered sunlight for warmth and protection from wind.

