

# Why Milkweed?

In most ways, monarchs are just like other butterflies. Their wings are covered with tiny scales that give them their beautiful colors. They smell with their antennas and taste with their feet. And to drink sweet nectar from flowers, they each uncoil a long proboscis and use it as a straw. But there are a few things that make the monarch butterfly extra special ...

Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed, their **only** caterpillar host plant. Milkweed produces toxins to deter animals from eating it, but monarchs have evolved immunity to these toxins! As they feed, monarch caterpillars store up the toxins in their body, making them taste bad, which in turn deters their predators. The toxins remain in their system even after metamorphosis, protecting them as adult butterflies as well.

The most observable factor that makes monarchs reign supreme is their amazing, one-of-a-kind, long-distance migration. Journey over to the next panel to find out more!



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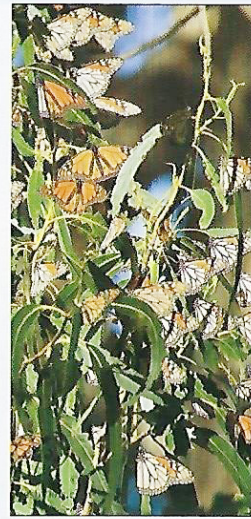
Operations Center  
P.O. Box 1637  
Merrifield, VA 22116-1637  
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# Going Places

Most adult monarchs only live for a few weeks, searching for food, for mates, and for milkweed on which to lay their eggs. However, the generation of monarchs that hatches in late summer delays finding a mate and undertakes a spectacular fall migration. This migratory generation can live upward of 8 months!

Each fall, millions of these monarchs head for their wintering grounds. Those in the West head for the California coast. Those in the East and Midwest fly to a cool, damp forest in the mountains of Mexico. Some travel as far as 3,000 miles in just two months! They gather by the millions in a few small patches of forest, hanging from tree trunks and branches. Many may die from cold night temperatures, but many others survive until the weather turns warm again. In spring, the survivors begin the trip back north.

On the way back, the monarchs stop to mate, lay eggs on milkweed plants, and then die. The eggs hatch into caterpillars, feed on the milkweed, and grow into adults. Then those adults fly another part of the long journey north. They, too, will stop to mate and reproduce. By mid-summer, the grandchildren of the monarchs that left Mexico reach the northern states and Canada!



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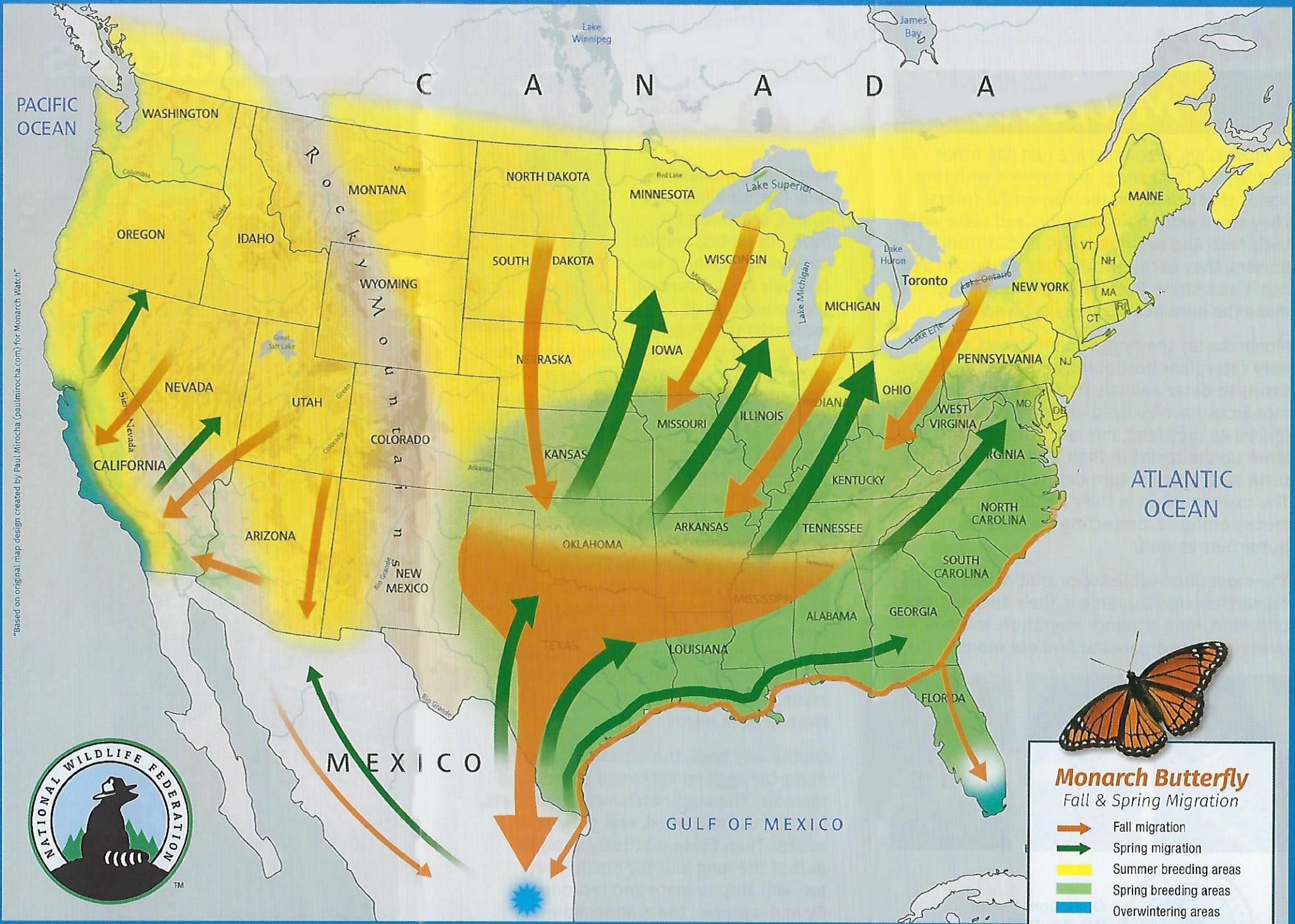
# Monarchs



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on the Move

"Based on original map design created by Paul Mirocha (paulmrocha.com) for Monarch Watch"



**Monarch Butterfly**  
Fall & Spring Migration

-  Fall migration
-  Spring migration
-  Summer breeding areas
-  Spring breeding areas
-  Overwintering areas

**POLLINATORS IN PERIL: Monarch butterfly migration patterns**