

Monarch Moments Might Be a Thing of the Past

Do you remember how you learned about life cycles? It seems like every classroom had their own mesh tank full of monarch larvae. I distinctly remember the black and yellow flutter as we released our flock into the meadow behind the school. Monarchs are an incredible species. They are barely 2 inches large and yet they make the same migration journey as most birds, traveling all the way to Mexico to spend their winters.

Back in 1990 the Monarch population was recorded at 1 billion. The population has declined by over 90% since then, with the lowest ever population of 35 million recorded last year. The Fish and Wildlife Service has started a year-long review: the first step in the process to get the Monarch placed on the Endangered Species list. Why are these incredible insects disappearing so quickly? Until recently logging of their habitat in Mexico was responsible for the decline. Government protection has since eliminated that threat but they are still at risk. Farming and drought in the Midwest has cost over 65% of their habitat. If the monarch were to reach endangered status, its habitats in the United States would become protected under law. This could have far reaching effects on the spraying of pesticides and farming. One of the main cited causes of monarch decline is the spraying of herbicides to kill off milkweed. Milkweed is both the sole food source of monarchs as well as a common weed that outcompetes soybeans and corn on most farms.

It might be years before the Fish and Wildlife Service places Monarchs on the Endangered Species list and some scientists say just a few bad storms could make the declining population irreversible. That means monarchs need your help now. Enlist the help of your friends, teachers, and parents. Visit www.saveourmonarchs.org to learn how you can help save the species through the planting of milkweed, or purchase your own kit of monarch caterpillars and release them into the wild.