

Monarch Waystation Grows

Article & photos by Robert Hernandez, South Texas Border Chapter

What a spectacular sight!! Each fall millions of monarch butterflies pass through our region on their way to their overwintering grounds in the oyamel fir forests of central Mexico. The following spring these migrants return to the southern tier of states so their offspring and successive generations can fly north to repopulate the summer range. However, it appears the numbers of this majestic butterfly continues to decline each year. One of the reasons for this decline is destruction of the habitat necessary for monarchs to reproduce and to sustain both the species and this migration phenomenon.

The Rio Grande Valley is situated along the southern monarch migration route. Monarchs from southern Canada and the northern and central regions of the United States migrate to their overwintering grounds in Mexico and spend the winter in a hibernation-like state.

Monarch butterflies use milkweed as the host plant and without this plant they are unable to reproduce. Milkweed and other nectar sources have been on the decline each year due to destruction of habitat through urban development and the continued use of herbicides and pesticides mostly on genetically modified corn and soybean fields.

In 2018, the Texas Master Naturalist South Texas Border Chapter (STBC) decided to take action. They joined the thousands of groups and individuals across the country who have created monarch waystations to provide these resources vital to monarch conservation. The group decided to transform a small patch of land next to the patio area of St. George Orthodox Church Meeting Hall in Pharr, Texas, which serves as the chapter's meeting venue.



Sign denotes Monarch Watch waystation

Once the chapter had researched Monarch Watch's requirements and guidelines for certification of a monarch waystation at monarchwatch.org/waystations, the volunteers were ready to tackle the compacted, dry earth and undergo the transformation. The guidelines to create, conserve, and maintain



a monarch waystation can be found on the monarch watch website. Any group or individual can create their own certified monarch waystation in home gardens, schools, or any unused plot of land. You can also contribute to the cause by adding milkweeds and nectar sources to already existing gardens. The best choice of milkweed are common milkweed, butterfly weed, and zizotes milkweed. Although beautiful, try to avoid tropical milkweed as it tends to disrupt the reproductive process and migratory development.

Monarch found in an Iowa monarch waystation—photo by Diane Hall



In the end, you will have joined the 46,000 individuals or groups of people that have created monarch habitats throughout the continent so that we can continue to experience this monarch migration phenomenon. This action is twofold, contributing to sustaining a healthy population of this magnificent butterfly while at the same time contributing to the health of our planet through pollination.

(Above and right) Current views of STBC monarch waystation at St. George Orthodox Church Meeting Hall in Pharr

