

The monarchs have landed

Sighting of first monarch of season in Kings County

The first monarch butterfly of the season was sighted in Nova Scotia in Cambridge by monarch enthusiast Larry Bogan recently.

Bogan volunteers to operate a way station to monitor the threatened monarch butterfly. He is part of a large network of volunteers who are trying to help this species at risk. But, he could use some help.

"Milkweed is critical for monarch survival and grows well in our area," said the retired Acadia physicist and long-time naturalist. "Monarchs have been visiting our fields for many years to breed and we have made an extra effort to protect eggs and larvae so that more survive to adults. This helps preserve the monarch and its fantastic yearly migration."

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI), based out of Queens County, coordinates a province-wide "Butterfly Club" that helps people establish monarch butterfly habitat on their properties.

The MTRI has partnered with three garden centres

in Nova Scotia to bring native butterfly-friendly plants as part of their regular stock.

"We need to help endangered species, and being a part of the Butterfly Club is something people of all ages can do and is a great start in making a difference" says Mallory Heim, a species at risk researcher at MTRI.

A lack of food sources plays a major role in monarch survival. Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed plants, which is the main food source for monarch caterpillars.

Milkweed is in high demand by gardeners across Nova Scotia, and can be found at Wiles Lake Farm Market in Bridgewater, Oceanview Garden Centre in Chester and Baldwin's Nursery

in Falmouth. Each nursery has swamp willweed and a butterfly garden display for people to learn how to create butterfly habitat.

All the buzz around monarchs is in an effort to regenerate their populations and create awareness of the species. In 2013-2014, the overwintering numbers for monarchs were at an all-time low, dropping to less than one hectare in Mexico with zero confirmed monarch sightings in Nova Scotia.

Things were a bit better the following year, with overwintering numbers to just over one hectare and 12 sightings reported in Nova Scotia. In 2015-2016, the numbers increased yet again to just over four hectares.

"We now have hundreds of people growing milkweed in their gardens in Nova Scotia so if there are any upward trends in Mexico we will be ready for the monarchs to arrive here and lay their eggs," says Heim.



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A monarch butterfly. The first one has been spotted this season in Nova Scotia.