

Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus Plexippus*)

By: George Constantourakis

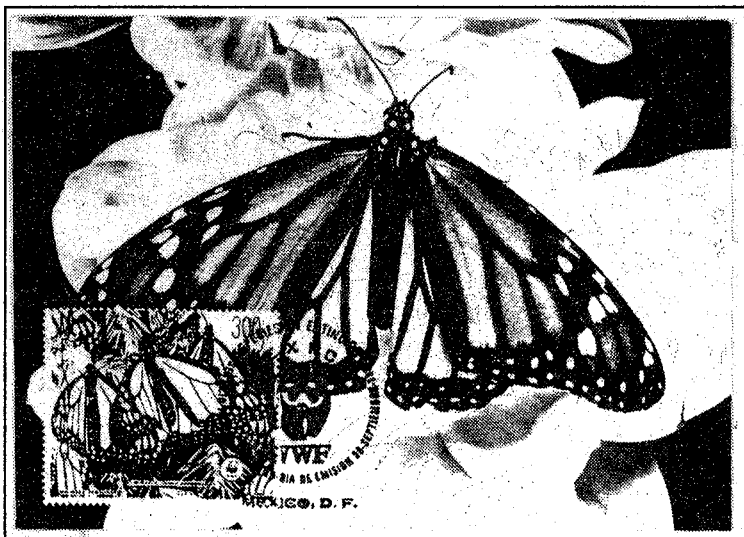
Taxonomic classification

Phylum: *Arthropoda*
 Class: *Insecta*
 Order: *Lepidoptera*
 Family: *Nymphalidae*
 (viz. Brush-footed Butterfly)
 Subfamily: *Danainae*
 (viz. Milkweed Butterflies)

The family of the milkweed butterflies includes 175 species, eg. the Queen, the African, and many mimics. The Monarch Butterfly is noted first, for its *bright colours* – that is orange with white spots and prominent black veins and borders; Second, for the striking sight of its *wing-span* of 76 to 102mm; and third, for its ability to *migrate* long distances.

Range & Habitat

Monarch butterflies are indigenous to North America. In the summer they are found throughout the United States and southern Canada, while in the winter they concentrate in small cool areas of Central Mexico, and the coast of California. Monarchs have three distinct habitats:



Monarch: On Card feeding; On Stamp winter roosting in the Oyamel Fir trees of the C. Mexican highlands.

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First, the Summer Breeding Habitat, which consists of open meadows, where the milkweed plant grows. The female monarchs lay their eggs on the underside of the milkweed leaves.

Second, the Migratory Habitat, when the main need is abundant nectar. In the Autumn, they fly southward to the highlands of Central Mexico. In the Spring, they fly northward to USA and southern Canada. Each journey can reach a distance of 3,000km. Among all butterflies many of which migrate in one way or another, no other practices a two-way migration of such proportions. By evolving a bird-like migrations, Monarchs have gained the ability to use the abundant supply of milkweeds of North America. The southward journey in the Autumn is accomplished by one generation of Monarchs. However for the northward journey in the Spring, it may take three or four generations to return to the original range, arriving in May or early June.

Third, the Winter Roosting Habitat. The vast majority of Monarchs' winter in a small area in the Sierra Madre Mountains west of Mexico City. In these cool highlands, Monarchs find the right conditions they need to maintain a state of low metabolism, thereby conserving the nutrients they need for the return northward flight. Monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains winter on the Californian coast. The most famous colonies are in the eucalyptus trees of Monterey Bay.



Monarch butterfly: On Card & Stamp: in flight during migration

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Life, Behaviour & Migration

In the summer, female Monarchs lay hundreds of eggs on the underside of the milkweed leaves. From the eggs come minute caterpillars (larvae). The caterpillar is banded with black, yellow, and white and bears two pairs of filaments. They feed upon the plant's somewhat toxic sap. They are not harmed by these toxins, but their predators, the birds, avoid them, because they taste bad. This stage lasts two weeks. Next moult yields the chrysalis, or pupa, in a jade-green pellet. Under the pupa shell, the caterpillar transforms into the adult butterfly in about ten days. The adults then seek nectar, mating and begin a new generation, having lived a fortnight. The final generation Monarchs, emerging in September or October, are quite different in that they are sexually immature; however, they emerge with strong flight muscles and a tendency to fly long distances. Monarchs accomplish this astonishing feat of flying from southern Canada and the US to the highlands of Central Mexico in eight to twelve weeks. The Monarch's means of navigation is still a mystery. Even more a mystery is that the monarch's offspring can find these places without ever having been there before. Nevertheless, no other gathering of butterflies can rival that of the Monarchs, for sheer splendour and wonder. Moreover, the migratory phenomenon of the Monarch represents one of nature's most magnificent mysteries.

KNOWN MAXIMUM CARDS:

Mexico: Four different published by the World Wildlife Fund
Cancellation - Mexico City, 30 Sept, 1988 (First Day)

Canada: Card Published by Insectarium, City of Montreal
Cancellation - Ottawa, 15 Aug 1995 (First Day)

Card No. 87-130, published by Central Coast Books, CA, USA.
Cancellation - Ottawa, 15 Aug 1995 (First Day)

Card No. 87-2 by Central Coast Books, CA, USA
Cancellation - Ottawa, 15 Aug 1995 (First Day)

Jerusalem 3000

Celebrating 3000 years since Jerusalem was founded by King David, it hosted the European Stamp Exhibition on December 16th to 21st, 1995. Exhibitors were represented from France, Germany, Luxembourg, Bulgaria and Israel. There were 5 maximaphily exhibits from 3 countries. Mr Joseph Wolff was present to judge these exhibits. Our member Lucian Millis from Israel received a **VERMEIL** for his exhibit. From Defence to Comfort and Decoration (or fastidiousness). Can