NOLA Butterfly Club
Position Paper: Summer-fall-winter monarch rearing and milkweed gardening: 2/15/2025
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As of June 1, we can be confident all the spring migratory monarchs from Mexico have completed their Louisiana passage and their migratory progeny have departed. Recent research using new technologies plus including the effects of climate change have led us to believe the greater NOLA metropolitan area is still a spring ONLY breeding ground as per the migratory butterflies, though a minor route. However, NOLA is becoming, along with Baton Rouge, a "biological sink" for breeding monarchs. A sink is a location that attracts a species but cannot sustain it in a healthy state over time.

After daytime temperatures surpass 85 degrees, monarchs cannot fly the long distances required for true migration, although they can forage regionally. Also, solar changes that cue northward migratory behavior end here well before June 1. Interestingly, the spring eastbound Gulf Coast flyway, used by a small early cohort of monarchs, has only one native milkweed of any significance—aquatic milkweed, *Asc. perennisI*—past the Cameron area. Aquatic is an early spring floodplain plant that gets overgrown by tall summer grasses in its native habitat (as observed at Bonnie Carre spillway and Honey Island.) A modest milkweed, it's synchronized to foliate with the arrival and departure of early spring migrants. Along the Louisiana-Texas border, green milkweed, *Asc. viridis* is also an early leafer. The rest of our state has only a smattering of other native milkweeds in herbarium records. We are, in whole, only a little important in spring. What about fall?

Note that fall southbound monarchs do not breed until after they successfully reach Mexico, so they don't need milkweed. Dr. Orley Taylor, founder of Monarch Watch, in personal conversation, stated few Mexican Biosphere winter tagging recoveries are from the southeast U.S.as whole and few are from Louisiana. A startling 2024 research paper by Dockx et. al. found however, a presence of southeastern U.S. derived monarchs over-wintering in south Florida (where Oe is pandemic) and the greater Caribbean, both currently and in the historical record.

Lack of nectar and suitable roosting areas are recently keeping southbound migrants from reaching their Mexican destinations. Observers at the Biospheres report finding emaciated butterflies dying on arrival. This is something we in all of Louisiana can address, as our entire state is still a flyway to Mexico, even if not registering much of a presence. And possibly a flyway to the Caribbean, that we hopefully will learn more about.

Because our club focuses on supporting the eastern migration, known to be the genetic mother-ship of monarchs worldwide, in contrast to "saving" individual monarchs, the following is our policy on monarch rearing and milkweed gardening in the NOLA area:

1. SPRING: We support only native milkweed gardening, preferably a species native to one's area. That would be aquatic milkweed below Lake Ponchartrain , adding *viridis, tuberosa*, *incarnata and a few other regionally available* above the Lake. Do not plant densely. Non-natives, especially tropical milkweed, especially in urban areas, and especially when in dense stands, are known factors in creating Oe sinks. A sink is an area that attracts a species but cannot sustain a healthy population.

2. SUMMER & FALL: By June 1st, discontinue any kind of assistance to monarch caterpillars and start cutting back large stands of native milkweed in urban areas. Well speced natives are fine, as are natural habitats. Bulk up on nectar plants of all species, especially fall bloomers. Add butterfly host plants for other species such as passionflower vines, dill, fennel, citrus, legumes, sennas, pipevines and sassafras. If near waterways, consider adding trees and shrubs for fall roosting.

3. CAPTIVE or HOME REARING: we ask members not to.

3. POSTING TO WEBSITE: We will post only in line with the above protocols.