

What About the Monarch Butterfly?

The migration of the Monarch butterfly and its hibernation in Mexico is a unique natural phenomenon. Each year, towards the end of the summer, the entire Monarch population from Canada and the United States east of the Rockies sets off on its journey south towards the dense fir forests found along the neo-volcanic chain cutting across Mexican territory. Some 3000 meters above sea level, these forests cover more than 7400 acres in the states of Mexico and Michoacán and provide ideal conditions for the Monarch's overwintering.

Tens of millions of Monarchs feed on the profusion of flowers that cover Mexico after the end of the rainy season, storing up the fats they need to hibernate for four months. Nonetheless, the most important factor for the Monarch's survival after it leaves the coldest regions of North America is access to specific ecological conditions; these are

found only in Mexico's highland fir forests.

Rodolfo Ogarrío, president of "Monarch, A.C.," a non-profit organization concerned with the butterfly's conservation, explains that a number of processes, especially population growth and the advances of technology, have reduced the extension of Mexico's forests. Thus, the sites used year after year by the Monarch represent some of the last remaining habitats providing the conditions needed for its hibernation.

"This situation," he adds, "makes the project to preserve the Monarch's hibernation habitat an important one for Mexicans. It offers us the opportunity to coexist with other generational beings, a kind of consciousness that we lose from time to time."

He acknowledges that in the case of the Monarch, as in many



Photo by Sergio Dorantes

other similar ones, it's not really the animal that must be protected; the butterfly can take care of itself. It's the habitat that's in danger.

Therefore, the Mexican government's decision to backtrack on a previous decree establishing a Monarch butterfly sanctuary is of great concern. The ecological reserve in the Chincua and El Rosario mountains, in the states of Mexico and Michoacán, where the butterfly overwinters each year, was to have become a sanctuary area for the

species. That decree was replaced by a ministerial-level agreement in which the Ministries of Urban Development and Ecology, and of Public Education will allow researchers to work in the area, using facilities originally constructed for natural resources management.

We hope that this is only a temporary situation and that we will soon have a fully established Monarch butterfly sanctuary in Mexico.

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