

## Monarch Migration Fiesta!

Neighbors and friends came from fields, forests, farms and homes to Thorpewood on Sunday, September 17<sup>th</sup> to help learn about Monarch butterflies and release some recently emerged Monarchs to begin their 2,000 mile journey to the high mountain oyamel forests of Mexico for a winter rest. Kids wore their wings and paraded with enthusiasm, often jumping off low rock walls to get a taste for themselves of what flight might be like.

Jim Gallion shared both practical and natural history information about the Monarch butterfly. He and his wife Teresa have raised butterflies at their Walkersville home for several years. They bring eggs indoors to their nursery along with plenty of milkweed, the Monarch's critical food stuff. Jim showed participants how the Monarch egg is laid on the underside of milkweed leaves, giving the tiny caterpillars nearby food to munch as soon as they hatch.

When first hatched the baby caterpillars graze the surface of the milkweed in a crescent shaped pattern, moving along to a new spot to prevent the milky substance emitted by the leaf from sticking their "lips" together!

The caterpillars shed their ectoskeleton four times and grow larger each time with plenty of milkweed for nourishment. Without milkweed, they cannot survive. The plant contains a substance making the caterpillars bad tasting (and toxic) to their prospective predators, giving them an advantage in the challenging task of surviving to adulthood. Completing its final largest stage, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis, hanging down from a spot not far from the milkweed that nourished its growth.

Jim and Teresa raise the caterpillars from eggs indoors to protect them from predators and parasites. The insects complete their cycle in their home. From the chrysalis, the adult butterflies emerge, crumpled up at first, but soon ready for flight. Jim and Teresa brought 18 adult Monarchs, just emerged from their chrysalids within the past 24 hours for tagging, release and celebration at Thorpewood – 8 actually emerged in front of awed on-lookers Sunday afternoon. After attaching tiny mylar tags, recording information about each butterfly's gender and history, Jim placed each butterfly on the open hand of a waiting child. The children lifted their hands skyward and the butterflies took flight. First, just a short trip to the top of a nearby tree to get their bearings. And then, up to catch a thermal and head south toward Mexico.

Do you have milkweed and nectar plants growing in your yard, garden or nearby fields? If not, find a seed source from a friend, neighbor, or nursery and become a Way Station or stop over for Monarchs who need those foods in the spring and summer. The Monarchs will also need plenty of nectar in the fall for that long trip to Mexico!

For additional information, contact Jim and Teresa Gallion at [www.gardeningadventures.com](http://www.gardeningadventures.com) or Monarch Watch at [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org)