

MLMP....Much More Than Monarchs

While most volunteers join the MLMP because of their interest in monarchs, the project has a wider scope. This is well-illustrated in volunteer Sabina Sanderson's summer monitoring account.

Participating in the MLMP at Merrill Creek Reservoir (MCR) proved an interesting and educational experience. Certainly those of us who are not trained entomologists made the acquaintance of a lot of new "bugs" – greatly helped by the project's excellent field guide – and I learned firsthand what a batch of milkweed tussock moth larvae can do to milkweed plants. Initially, we all became rather discouraged since our searches resulted in: eggs, 0; larvae, 0. We even came up with ingenious theories on why monarchs don't breed in northwestern New Jersey. We threw those out when it became apparent that the monarchs simply hadn't arrived quite yet; eggs and larvae eventually started turning up at all our sites. I let out such a yelp on finding our first larva – a 4th instar no less – that one of our two MCR interns thought I'd been bitten by something.

Monarch monitors at MCR, with its roughly 2000 acres of woods and fields surrounding a 650-acre reservoir, attract lots of attention. Most of our monitoring sites are beside hiking trails, and one of the "perks" we enjoyed was watching approaching hikers, baffled by the sight of one to four people diligently examining milkweeds. Almost unfailingly they stopped to ask what we were doing. A brief explanation elicited responses such as "Gosh, I used to raise monarchs when I was a kid!"



MCR "Green Path" Site

MCR is a haven for all kinds of birds. On one occasion we watched three Ospreys put on a splendid aerial display, and Jane Bullis and I once counted 28 cormorants winging their way across the reservoir. If we were lucky, one or even both of our nesting pairs of bald eagles soared past. But the most unusual bonus occurred while Katie and I were checking site III. Something caught my eye and I promptly called to Katie, "Look who's going swimming!" It was a recently released (and radio-collared) young female black bear. We watched while she swam out about 20 feet and then turned in, swam back to shore, and disappeared into the woods. It was a very hot day, and Katie and I agreed that she has simply felt that a nice, cool dip was in order (bears are exempt from the no swimming rule at MCR)!

Despite occasional lack of cooperation from the weather, the presence of what sometimes seemed like an excessive number of thistles and brambles mixed in with the milkweeds, and other such "incidentals", we all enjoyed participating in this worthwhile endeavor.

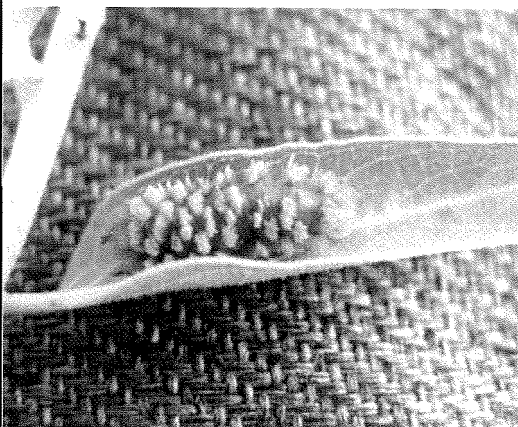


MLMP Volunteer Sabina Sanderson

Tips from the Milkweed Patch

- * To avoid having to report that, "there are two thermometers hiding in our field", as one MLMP volunteer did, tie a string around your thermometer so it can be hung from your neck.
- * Newcomb's guides to wildflowers and butterflies through binoculars are references that have been deemed handy by participants.
- * Using laminated signs to identify your milkweed patch as part of the MLMP is a great way to spark curiosity and concern from passer-bys. This is particularly useful when your site is located near a path, park, or other high-traffic area.
- * In one nature center, larvae from the parasitism activity were used as an educational tool to promote the MLMP and raise environmental awareness.
- * When monitoring with young volunteers, simplify the data sheet and dress it up with clipart (see our website for samples).
- * Put bug boxes into your monitoring kit; to collect 4th or 5th instar monarchs for the parasitism study or to identify and raise other interesting invertebrates.

What a Find!



This *Cyenia inopinatus* moth larva, was discovered and reported as a first sighting in Kendall County by Myrna Langford and Kip Kiphart during MLMP data collection in Texas.