

# Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy launches butterfly project

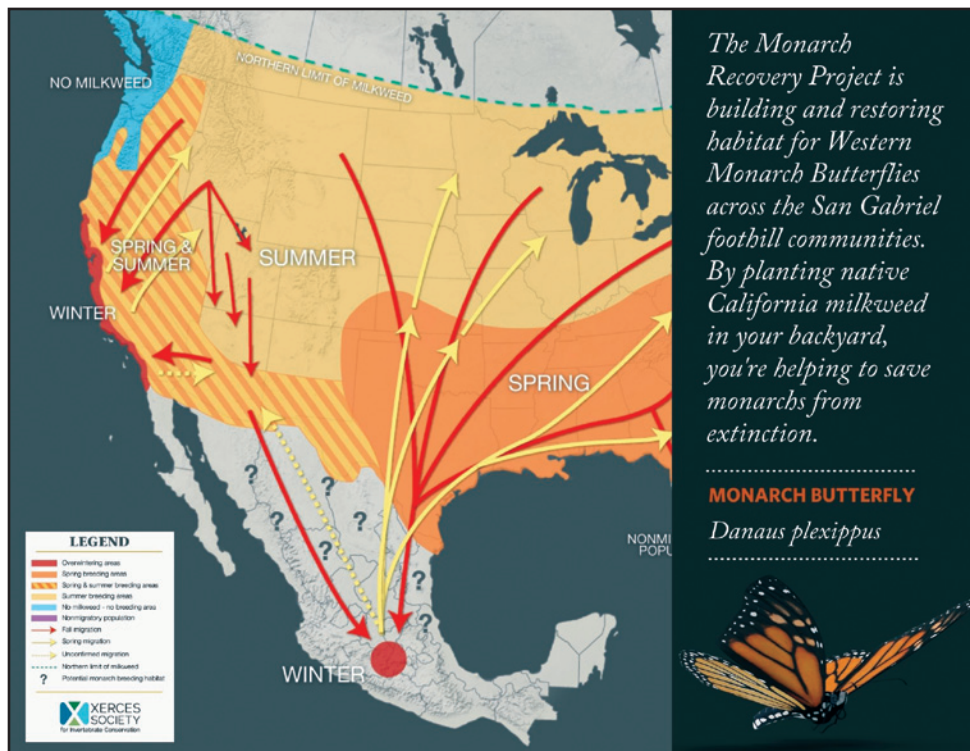
by John Howell

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**M**onarch butterflies, with their distinctive black and orange wings, are a familiar subject to many of us from elementary school. Learning about butterfly life cycles, caterpillars, and the magical transformation that happens inside a chrysalis is a staple of childhood science, and it's a delight to recognize these familiar butterflies when they flit by.

But what you may not know is that the western monarch butterfly, which once migrated across California in the millions, is on the verge of extinction. Western monarch populations in California have crashed by a shocking 99.9% since the 1980s, and annual butterfly counts at overwintering sites puts the current population well below the 30,000 butterflies needed to continue the species. Sadly, this trend is also true for the eastern monarch butterfly, whose migratory population has declined by more than 80% since tracking started in the 1990s. Why? A dramatic loss of habitat and the impacts of climate change have combined to push them to the brink.

While efforts are underway to designate western monarchs as an endangered species, the most critical action we can take right now to save these beloved butterflies is to plant and restore native butterfly habitat — and more specifically, native milkweed. That's why the Arroyos



*The Monarch Recovery Project is building and restoring habitat for Western Monarch Butterflies across the San Gabriel foothill communities. By planting native California milkweed in your backyard, you're helping to save monarchs from extinction.*

& Foothills Conservancy, in partnership with other conservation organizations, has launched the Monarch Recovery Project, building and restoring habitat for western monarch butterflies across the San Gabriel foothill communities.

The project kicks off this fall by collecting 1,000 native milkweed plants growing on AFC preserves, in backyards and on patios by the end of 2021. In addition to providing free milkweeds for you to replant, we've also developed a scientific tracking process that will help scientists see where that milkweed has been planted, how much has survived, and how it impacts monarch populations.

If you'd like to participate in the project, visit [arroyosfoothills.org/monarch-recovery-project](https://arroyosfoothills.org/monarch-recovery-project) and pre-register for one of the milkweed adoption events this fall. You'll get a hands-on opportunity to learn about planting and sustaining milkweed plants with AFC experts, and you'll also receive three native milkweed plants to take home with you, for free.

Once you plant them, you'll receive a follow-up survey to provide location information on your plants. The AFC will remove personal information, process the data,

and then aggregate it into large maps and datasets, so that biologists and scientists can use this first-in-the-nation pilot program to track milkweed plantings, survival rates, and what impact habitat restoration has on monarch butterflies.

## Did you know?

- Monarch butterflies don't sleep: instead, they rest at night or when temperatures are cool in dense canopy trees like oaks and sycamore, which help regulate heat and humidity.
- Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on native milkweed plants, and those are the only food that Monarch Caterpillars eat.
- Monarch butterflies need moisture but can't land on water, so they sip liquid from muddy soil. This is called "puddling," and in addition to water, provides essential salts and dissolved minerals.
- Adult monarch butterflies drink the nectar of native flowering plants to survive — that includes milkweed but also a wide variety of other flowers that bloom throughout the year.