

Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust

March 2006 Newsletter

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Report to Members

It is only nine months since we formed this organisation, but we have accomplished so much to date – and we have some exciting projects planned for next season.

We have 250 members – contributing \$5,000. Over nine months our total income has been almost \$20,000. There have been some grants (Lion Foundation funded four extremely durable bannerstands which were seen at our Christchurch exhibition, and the Festival Committee funded our participation there to the tune of \$7,000).

The website draws responses and activity daily. We have been overwhelmed by the high amount of traffic and the people who come seeking (and getting) useful information from the various pages. We receive lots of positive comments on its professionalism and positivity.

All in all I think you should be proud of what has been achieved – and none of this would have been possible without your involvement.

The Trustees at their recent meeting discussed membership subscriptions for the financial year 1 July 2006-2007, and decided to retain a \$20 membership fee for the year or part thereof. All members have received four copies of the newsletter, and although a member joining this month will receive four back copies, the content is not dated and should be as useful as it was when it was first sent out.

We have sufficient funds to complete the Butterfly Bay investigation and report when the hearing is reconvened (probably next month), and we are now looking at future projects for next season.

Two which have been suggested are:

- (a) Transects - Members undertake weekly walks of a specific distance over the six warmer months, and log the number of butterflies they see. This will give an indication over the years if our butterfly population is increasing or decreasing. Butterflies are an important indicator as to the health of the environment.
- (b) Members tag Monarchs before release with durable tags. As butterflies are recovered, we can gather data as to how far they have travelled, length of life, and migratory patterns. This was first undertaken in NZ in the 1960s, and it was found that most Monarchs stayed within 20km of where they were tagged. If you would like to be involved, please email projects@monarch.org.nz

Gilly, Helen, Jacqui and Shelley - Trustees

Festive, floral, romantic

We were invited by the Festival of Flowers & Romance Committee, Christchurch, to participate in this year's festival. They 'matched us' up with the Canterbury Museum, who built an amazing, tailor-made venue for us.

Shelley and Jacqui travelled south shortly before the exhibit opened, taking with them about 200 Monarchs in all stages. We had earlier sent Swan plants down to an organic grower in Lincoln, so when we arrived we had large, healthy plants already grown in pots.



We had one day to stock the beautiful little gazebo that the Museum had created, and needed to find nectar plants. At a Lincoln nursery we spotted a huge Hebe (*H. Wiri Spears*) thick with purple flowers; they allowed us to prune it. A member brought in a spray of yellow Buddleia, and these two were the favourite sources of nectar.

For the next ten days it was 'full on', greeting and entertaining and listening to and advising many, many people. Correcting misinformation – butterflies don't come from cocoons, and they live longer than 24 hours, much longer. Agreeing to find out when we didn't know...

Wonderful people, a great experience. It was rewarding meeting members from all over the South Island – and enrolling new members too.

We 'sold' pins and packets of Giant Swan Plant seeds. CDs with film footage of larvae pupating and butterflies emerging contributed by member Marilyn Corbishley of the Hawkes Bay were very popular too.

It was highly successful. You can see some of the photographs by going to this website here <http://tinyurl.com/px4w3>

Shelley ruled the gazebo, making sure there were no fingers touching the livestock, while Jacqui kept tabs on the desk and also in her own inimitable way went through the life cycle with the children. Her practice flights, followed by groups of children all flapping their wings, were entertaining to say the least!

We were kept so busy – we have resolved that we need at least twice as many volunteers next time!

On the final day we took many of the butterflies out into the Botanic Gardens, and released them. They were surrounded by nectar flowers - paradise!



If you've printed this out and read it... why not pass this to a friend, put it on the community noticeboard, give it to a school...

Bon voyage, Shelley!

Trustee Shelley Gifford is leaving our shores to travel abroad, with the intention of spending some time in Ireland. We wish her well.

We know that she will continue to represent the MBNZT wherever she goes, reporting back with good ideas and experiences of butterflies elsewhere in the world. Happy travels, Shelley!



If you have received this in the mail, but would like it emailed as a pdf in future, please email us.

Snippets from Gilly

 Wasp catcher – cut the top $\frac{1}{4}$ off a 1.5 litre plastic bottle. Glue or staple it on upside down, so the narrow opening faces down into the bottle – and then half-fill the container with a softdrink, or sugar and water, with a little detergent. Wasps will fly in to feed on the sweet solution and cannot find the opening to fly out again.

 My eggs do not survive outdoors due to predators. I cut off the leaf with the egg on, lay on a wet paper towel and mist regularly until the tiny larva emerges. With a fine wet artist's paintbrush, I then transfer the tiny larva to a vase with swan plant in and keep my tiny larvae away from my bigger hungry ones.

 To keep ants off your milkweed (they do steal eggs and tiny larvae), I put a thick smear of Vaseline around the base stem of the plant (this needs to be repeated weekly) or I scatter talcum powder around the dripline of the plant.

 To remove a chrysalis from a precarious position, mist around the cremaster (the stem) and then tease the silk out with a pin. Either use the pin, or use sticky tape or a thread, to attach the chrysalis to a less hazardous place.

 To my absolute delight, last week I saw my first Red Admiral feasting on my purple buddleia. A few weeks ago I observed a Yellow Admiral also... I hope they will take up residence in my garden and lay eggs on my pot of stinging nettle.

You know you are an incurable Monarch lover when...

- ♥ you hear rain in the night, and lie there worrying about your butterflies;
- ♥ your kids give you an 'I Brake For Butterflies' sticker and put it on the bumper,
- ♥ you see a colourful garden and wish you had a butterfly to share it with;
- ♥ your kids are tired of explaining why you carry a butterfly net in your belt;
- ♥ your kids find other rides because they don't want to get caught in a butterfly stop;
- ♥ you see a neighbour's garden rubbish, and go through removing the eggs/ caterpillars from the dying Swan plants;
- ♥ your husband says butterfly-spotting while driving may be more dangerous than talking on the mobile while driving.

Raising butterflies through the Winter

In May last year, realising that her Monarchs were not surviving outside, Gilly once again began to rear them inside. She says:

We have a little glassed-in front entry and this room is now my 'Monarch station'. I have straw hats hanging from the ceiling and cane baskets which the caterpillars love to crawl onto/under to pupate.



Outside I have some of Diana Dawson's *Asclepias curassavica* (Bloodflower) plants, all in bloom. These attract the Monarchs wonderfully. One of these plants is covered by Diana's 'caterpillar cosy' and a few hours after a Monarch has emerged, I put her on this plant covered by the cosy. There she can rest until mid-afternoon, feeding and kept safe from predators in her vulnerable state. Mid-afternoon I undo the cosy and the butterflies can begin their journey.



Before release I measure the width of the wing of each butterfly and keep a note of its size and sex.

A few other Monarch members are noting down their release numbers also and have been sending them to me. Perhaps we need to incorporate these figures in to our Monarch website in some way?

My records over the past few months show:



| Month | Males | Females | Total | Average Size |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|--------------|
| November | 23 | 36 | 59 | 50.31mm |
| December | 66 | 56 | 122 | 50.21mm |
| January | 77 | 69 | 146 | 50.44mm |
| February | 94 | 127 | 221 | 49.28mm |

I've noticed that male Monarchs are particularly aggressive of late, and am wondering if this is due to the excessive heat experienced over February; or is it due to the end of summer, and their urge to procreate is tremendous?

It would be interesting to find out more about this.

Gilly