

August 01, 2020

By Dave Euler

The day was hot and sunny, and 15 people from the Sault Naturalists wanted to contribute to Mission Monarch. Mission Monarch is a national wide effort designed to monitor the status of Monarch Butterflies across North America.

Populations of these beautiful butterflies have fluctuated over the last few years, and they are under threat from habitat loss and elimination of their major food source, the Common Milkweed plant. Common Milkweed plants are often considered “weeds” and eliminated from farm fields and even natural areas in cities and towns.

The Internet can be a powerful tool to collect large amounts of data and help evaluate the rise and fall of wild species and natural areas. Mission Monarch uses the Internet to inspire people from all over North America to venture out into the fields where milkweed grows and examine the plants for the presence of Monarch eggs, caterpillars, and sometimes the chrysalises.

Mission Monarch has a website with information about the butterflies, their life cycle and how to collect data to help with this project. You can also see the results of the data collection. Already there are hundreds of people collecting data and you can see what they have found and where they have found it.

Here is the address for Mission Monarch:

<https://www.mission-monarch.org/>

The 15 people from the Sault Naturalists met at Kent’s Corners on St. Joseph Island at 10:00 AM for an initial briefing by me on what was to happen next. Everyone listened intently as the “plan” to move to the Wallwork Nature Reserve was explained. There were no objections and only one interruption.

Because of the pandemic and the need to adopt physical distancing, we drove in convoy to the Wallwork Nature Reserve approximately 20 km from Kent’s corners.

There were some complaints that I drove too slowly.

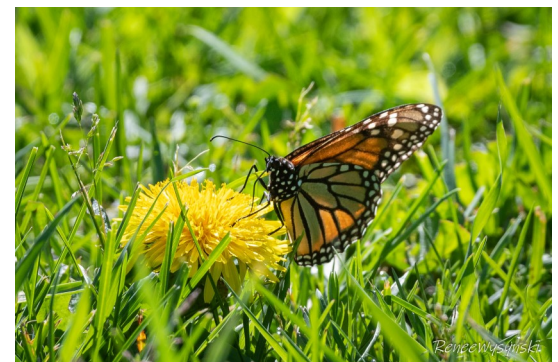
Before venturing into the reserve, I explained what Mission Monarch was all about, briefed everyone as to the process we would undergo to tour the reserve and then start the data collection.



Gladys Wallwork (2015)— Mark Olivier



Instruction session—Renee Wysynski



Monarch adult—Renee Wysynski



Searching for life stages—Dave Euler

Two people who were talking while I was talking were admonished. I was very pleased that only two people had to be corrected.

Following a brief tour of the Wallwork Nature Reserve, for about 1 hour and 45 minutes we searched for adult Monarch butterflies, their eggs and their caterpillars on the very abundant milkweed plants on the reserve. It was hot and it was hard work to bend over and search each plant for the various Monarch life stages.

There were no complaints. Everyone worked hard and the results were impressive and reflected the quality of work these 15 naturalists expended on this first day of August 2020.

A “Well Done” to all.



Data Results, Mission Monarch, August 1, 2020, Wallwork Nature Reserve

Number of Milkweed Plants examined	Number of Caterpillars	Number of eggs	Number of adults
547	13	73	4

Monarchs at Wallwork

The Sault Naturalists have had many outings to the Wallwork Reserve and people have remarked on the abundance of Monarch butterflies. They often fly over the open areas as we walk through, seeing mating adults flying over is not uncommon and we almost always see caterpillars. One of the pleasures of having the reserve on the Island is knowing that it is a large source of these butterflies.

One of the results of our data collection today could suggest an estimate of what production of Monarchs might be on this valuable milkweed preserve. While it is hard to be precise, we only sampled a small portion of the milkweed plants that grow there, probably 25% or less. If we sampled 25% of the plants there, that would mean that approximately 300 eggs might have been laid there in the last few days. We also found 13 caterpillars, which might mean more than 50 caterpillars might be hiding among the leaves of Milkweed.

While my ramblings are speculative, it does seem clear that the Wallwork Nature Reserve is an important nursery for Monarch butterflies.



Larva—Renee Wysynski



Keen collectors—Renee Wysynski

A good day for Monarchs and a good day for the Sault Naturalists.

For more photos, click [Renee's Photos](#)



Crab spider (left) and a tiny Monarch egg (right) - Renee Wysynski