

Dear members

Welcome to our June 2007 newsletter – with something to interest everyone.

Our organisation continues to grow, we now have over 550 members. As you will read from the three introductions inside, we have a wide variety of members – including young ones like Annelise (right). Members come from all walks of life; some are fit and not-so able-bodied, there are schools and scout groups, professional people and unemployed, and people of all ethnic backgrounds. Just about everyone loves butterflies!

We could publish a huge selection of mail but space is obviously limited.

You will also read about changes to our Trust Deed, as we seek to formalise our national focus, and also what we aim to do to help our beautiful butterflies, such as the Red Admiral (below left) and Yellow Admiral (below right) (photographs courtesy of Terence Smithers). We need members to come to our Special General Meeting - either in person (Russell) or on-line (in your own home).

We have a new feature addressing what one should be doing to help the Monarchs at this time of the year – and an article on the Buddleia, a much understated plant which many people think is a noxious weed.

There are also warnings about the dangers of working with milkweed and nettles.

But wait! There's more!!

We plan to be at the Ellerslie International Flower Show (14-18 November, Manukau City) and need volunteers to help set up, on the stand, and/or dismantle it afterwards – are you able to help?

This year we are continuing with The Butterfly



Project and hope to have more people tagging and also walking transects next summer. To do this we need funds, so if you know of any organisations offering donations or sponsorship, please let us know.

We have had approval from the Royal Society to have a teacher work on The Butterfly Project – if you know of a teacher who would like to take two terms out of the classroom, please show them this opportunity.

Our website is due for a revamp, and Vicky Steele is working on this. We're sure you'll love the new look.

Over recent months we have held open meetings in Tauranga and Hamilton and members have indicated a wish to do more local networking. That sounds like a good idea – a way in which you can share resources, not enough or too much milkweed would be one useful situation to resolve. If you are interested, please indicate this on your subscription form.

With this newsletter are forms for you to renew your subscription. You will see there are some excellent offers to encourage you to renew now! We hope that you will do so.

Barbara, Edith, Gilly, Jacqui, Shelley & Vicky



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**BE IN
TO WIN
see page 8**

Welcome to our Treasurer

As many of you know, we have been looking for a Treasurer for some time. In early May I approached a recent retiree to our community to see if he would take on this role.

Terry Greening has lived locally for two years but had continued to commute to his Air Force job in Auckland until his retirement at Easter this year. His wife Liz is a MBTNZ member, and she and I have worked on other projects together.

I heard Terry had retired when we were admiring each others' dogs outside the Russell Bookshop. I waited for a few hours, and then phoned Terry, fingers crossed!

me: "We are looking for someone to take on the role of Treasurer for the Monarch Butterfly Trust, and wondered if you would be interested?"

TG: "Yes, I'm keen to become involved in local activities and the community now that I am living here full time. What does it entail?"

me: "Basically it is receiving and banking the money we get, bringing the bills for payment along to our meetings, and helping me prepare and reconcile our budget. I assume that you've had experience of such in the Air Force. What was your role there?"

TG: "I was a maintenance engineer and at one time had responsibility for the aircraft maintenance budget for the Auckland-based fleet, which was several millions of dollars to manage. At other times in my career I was involved with clubs and committees that had much smaller budgets, probably more in line the Monarch Butterfly Trust."

me: "So you'll be familiar with Excel spreadsheets and, I use Quickbooks for the accounts?"

TG: "I use Excel regularly and have a 1990's version of Quicken that I use for our household budget."

me: "This sounds great! At present I have been acting as Secretary and Treasurer for the Trust, which is a lot of work on top of the other things I do for the Trust, as well as not being as fiscally transparent as an organisation like ours should be. Ideally, we should have someone who only does the Treasurer duties. It would probably only require half an hour (at the most) a couple of times a week to check the mail and bank any money received. On top of that would be our Trustees' meetings, and then towards the end of the financial year we would ask for help in preparing the budget. We also have a system of membership via a Telecom 0900 number, which I would explain in more detail if you took on the job. Are you interested?"

TG: "Yes, I am, Jacqui. I want to get involved in local activities, and this seems a good way of doing just that."

me: "Can you come to our meeting on Saturday, meet the other Russell Trustees? I'm sure they will be very pleased – and I can explain it in more detail."

So after that brief discussion outside the bookshop, Terry has taken over this role and the Trustees are, like me, delighted with how it's working. Thanks Terry!

Jacqui

Our Admirable Admirals

If you have a 'wild space', you can plant Ongaonga, our native Tree Nettle, and help revive the beautiful endemic Red Admiral/Kahukura (*Vanessa gonerilla*). Ongaonga grows mainly in forests, along river valleys or cliff edges in coastal areas, common near Wellington and Christchurch, to a height of about 1000m above sea level.

Beware, however, this plant is poisonous, and in fact is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the deadliest plant in the world. It packs one of the nastiest stings of any nettles and is said to have caused death in dogs and horses, and one tramper who pushed through a thicket of the plant. Definitely not for the front garden!

The Yellow Admiral/Kahukowhai (*Vanessa itea*) prefers to oviposit on the introduced small or annual nettle *U. Urens*, a weed of gardens, wasteland and cultivated farmland.

The Maori names for these butterflies mean 'red cape' and 'yellow cape' respectively, and like the English names refer to the prominent patches of those colours on their wings. Interestingly enough, the species was originally called 'Admirables' but the name became shortened. Both will be seen flying together on hilltops; this hill-topping is a trait the Vanessids are well known for around the world, or when they congregate at nectar flowers.

The Red Admiral tends to be regarded more as a forest species and the Yellow of gardens and open areas such as farmland and parks. Both species will also oviposit on the cut leaf nettle, *U. incisa*, which can be found in damp, partially shaded areas and is a native like *U. ferox*, and the perennial nettle, *U. dioica*, which like *U. urens* was accidentally introduced from Europe.

According to member Terry Smithers, English lepidopterist neither of our Admirals are as common as they used to be due to the widespread destruction of their food plants.

"It can be quite hard to find stinging nettles as they are destroyed far more readily than they are even in the UK," he says. "With its huge agricultural industry, NZ tends not to look kindly upon anything classed as a weed and therefore the humble nettle is eradicated without a second thought as to the consequences this may have on butterflies."

"The few NZ lepidopterists I have had contact with tell me that in some areas of NZ maybe only half a dozen Admirals are seen in a year."

Sometimes male butterflys have territorial disputes – often this involves Monarchs as well. One will swoop repeatedly at another, trying to intimidate it into leaving. If successful, it will chase after it for a short distance, seeing it off the premises.

On very sunny days pale yellow patches on the wings of the Kahukowhai reflect so much light they can appear white. These butterflies will not be seen over winter.

The NZ Red Admiral is not found naturally in any other country in the world – well worth protecting! Terry Smithers has made it even easier, by producing a 'how to' guide to creating your own butterfly house and rearing Yellow Admirals. Look for it in the forum.

Of Interest to School Teachers

Monarchs in NZ : Measuring their Survival

Are you a teacher – or do you know of one who would like to spend two terms out of the classroom, working with Monarchs?

The following proposal is listed with the Royal Society of NZ. Further information will be found on their website – basically the society will pay a teacher for two terms while they work on this project for the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust, and the good of NZ's lepidoptera.

Geographic Region:

Northland, South Auckland, East Coast, Porirua, Wairarapa, Christchurch, West Coast.

Suitable for a primary or secondary teacher with an interest in research and environmental education.

Starting Dates and Fellowship Duration:

A 22 week spring/summer programme – Term 4 2007 and Term 1 2008 or Terms I and 2, 2008.

Programme preamble

Although they are not an endemic species, Monarchs are familiar, well-loved insects that provide students and teachers with a comfortable, non-threatening experience with living organisms. Their easily-observed life cycle brings diverse and exciting science concepts to life, and their large size makes it easy for students to handle all life stages.

Working with living organisms in the classroom engages students and allows them to practise observation, measuring, hypothesis-making and evaluation skills.

Using Monarchs is especially appealing because it captures the interest and attention of all students, not just those with an 'aptitude for science'.

Currently we have little knowledge of Monarchs in a NZ context – density, distribution, where they overwinter, do they migrate or are there regional areas of migration etc.

Programme

Hosted by the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust the Fellow will be involved in this research and developing it so that students can be involved. It will involve developing new learning and modifying existing methods of tagging butterflies, collection, collation entry and methods of recording data so that students can participate in real research.

Objectives

1. Develop knowledge of the biology and ecology of the Monarch in a NZ context, and other endemic Lepidoptera species as time allows.
2. Become conversant with the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust's research, develop skills in tagging, collection, processing and analysing data by developing a research programme that students can use.
3. Develop, monitor and report on this research project trialled in at least two schools.

For further information write john.auty@rsnz.org.

The Dangers of Some Plants

If you love butterflies, you'll be out in the garden doing what you can to help them. Be very careful of the following plants. It is far better to be aware of the dangers.

Milkweed such as Swan plants (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus* and *G. physocarpus*) has poisonous white milky latex. Because of the educational benefits of teaching children about the lifecycle of the Monarch Butterfly, Swan plants are not on the Landcare Research list of plants that should not be grown or tolerated in NZ preschool centres.

Therefore, although it is toxic, Swan plants can be grown around small children providing supervisors are aware of its toxic nature, and all necessary precautions taken to prevent poisoning. See www.poisons.co.nz/fact.php?f=29

- Supervise children at all times when they are around the Swan plant
- Encourage children to enjoy the Swan plant and butterflies without eating them
- Grow Swan plants in a container that can be removed to an area inaccessible to children when not being used.
- Alternatively fence the Swan plant off, so it is unreachable to children without adult help
- Place the Swan plant in an open-topped bird cage so butterflies can get in and out, but children's hands cannot.

Stinging nettles – *Urtica* species – two are introduced and the third is native – host plants for our Admiral species.

Annual nettle (*U. urens*) is a common weed of gardens and waste places, especially where animals congregate.

Perennial nettle (*U. dioica*) is much less common, but may grow in partly shaded places in the vicinity of buildings.

The notorious giant native tree nettle or Ongaonga (*U. ferox*) has stings that can cause a numbing effect which lasts several days.

U. ferox is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the most dangerous plant in the world! People 'blundering' into a bush or bushes, can be so stung that it is deadly.

Dr Barrie Frost talks to Nelson group

In April member Dr Barrie Frost, from Queen's University, Ontario, addressed a Nelson group. It was a very enthusiastic audience, keenly interested in what Barrie had to say.

"A very knowledgeable man, and an extremely good teacher," said Chrissie Ward. "His talk was fascinating, and everyone learned a lot. The questions were pertinent, and showed how much there is still to learn about these beautiful butterflies, as well as what enthusiasm there is from their fans."

One of the benefits was to bring Monarch enthusiasts together, and the Nelson members are keen to repeat this.

"Even just having a network of local people who could exchange plants/seeds/caterpillars/knowledge would be really useful," added Chrissie. "According to Barrie, the situation of too many caterpillars/shortage of food is because of the paucity of milkweed in NZ. The Trust actively promoting other species, apart from the good old swan plant, certainly helps the Monarchs.

Meet some Members

We receive some lovely letters, postcards, cards and emails from members. Take this one for instance:

Hi. My name's Annelise and I'm 10 years old, I live in Christchurch.

I have loads of hobbies, here's some of them: butterflies, animals, art, and sport. The reason I love butterflies is because they're so small and delicate and very pretty and interesting.

Here's some of the things other children can do to help. Ask questions, plant a swan plant, have a pesticide free garden!

If you see a damaged butterfly, care for it don't squash it. Do some research and find out loads of interesting things that you never knew before!

Thanks Annelise, it's lovely to have you as a member. You can see her on the front page. Living not far away from her is Di Barritt (pictured right), who wrote:

"It has been an absolutely fascinating new hobby, watching them from my small flat. I have plants by my bedroom window, so when resting during the day, both Smudge (cat) and I have 'live action' right outside the window," she says. "I am willing to do what I can within my disabled capabilities, but I have to take each day as it comes."

Another member is Rob Herd who has been an avid collector of butterflies from times past and developed a love for tropical rainforests and the butterflies they contain.

A Wandering Monarch in a Milkweed Patch

Dr Myron Zalucki from Queensland University, also a member, spoke at Auckland in April. He produced a map of the Pacific showing the migration of Monarchs from the US between the 1840s and 1900s, when they had reached the Western Pacific. One thing was unusual – that at the same time they arrived in Hawaii, they were found to be in Taradale, Hawkes Bay – and yet they didn't reach islands such as Rarotonga and Fiji until much later.

Myron put the hypothesis that Monarchs' migration and overwintering in Mexico was an endangered phenomenon; we don't know for sure if Bt corn, climate change, and herbicides will impact on them... and by the time we find out, it might be too late to do anything about it. He told us that climate affects milkweed and affects reproduction and survival, and will also have a strong influence on seasonal and year-to-year abundance and distribution.

Some years ago, he collated records for Monarchs from all museums and natural history collections throughout Australia. He noted the season that these sightings had occurred, and from those built up a growth index, also showing how seasonal highs and lows, drought and other factors impacted upon the Monarch. He compared this with the ecoclimatic index for Monarchs in North America, creating a model for the optimum conditions for

"I was lucky enough to have gained recognition through Alan Cassidy who was recording the butterflies of Brunei when I was there. His keen eye for detail and good nature lead to a new sub-species named after me in 1985, called *Deramas jasoda herdi*. This butterfly is now kept in the London Natural History Museum."

However, Rob found it discouraging to see only a few species existed here in NZ, his home country.

"Seventeen in all, 30 if you include Australian migratory and unfortunate travellers of the air currents," he said.

"The butterflies were also well dispersed, some alpine and confined to the South Island tussock grasslands, some forest species, some coastal.

Rob tried moth collecting for a while as they were more abundant.

"Astonishingly, they were not dull boring and drab," he said. "There are some positively fantastic NZ moths – but all of this was boyhood discovery."

He still carries that love of nature and has spent many hours in the Auckland Museum identifying their butterfly collection of specimens from around the world.

He has now returned to university to upskill with a diploma in environmental science.

"Upon return to the workforce I hope to encourage the development of butterfly recognition in NZ."

Good on you, Rob! We're right behind you on that.



the survival of the Monarch.

In a series of slides, Myron illustrated the relationship between hostplant patch attributes, such as their size, density, age and the nectar availability, the population of Monarchs (size, sex ratio and age) and measures of egg-laying – the number of eggs per plant, and total number of eggs per patch. It showed that sex ratios were male-biased in areas with high hostplant density, and female biased on single plants.

He also noted that the number of eggs per plant were higher on single, isolated plants or areas of low host-plant density, than on a large planting of milkweed.

He commented that in Australian field studies, many first instar larva were found on single plants, but survival was often limited to food abundance, and late instars (larger caterpillars) survived better in patches where food was plenty, but were prone to predation and therefore survival was slightly lower.

Eggs on single plants give a higher return. Because, in NZ, we only have single plants, we need to consider larval food availability or supplement during shortages when larvae are growing.

Due to space constraints, this report has had to be abbreviated. However, the full report will be posted in the forum.

Buddleia

Buddleia is often called 'summer lilac', although 'Butterfly Bush' is a much more appropriate name for it. It doesn't just attract butterflies in profusion, it draws them like a powerful magnet as they search for nectar.

There's a lot of confusion about Buddleia. Ask for it at your local garden centre, and they'll probably tell you 'no, it's a weed'. But it is only the *B. davidii* that is listed as a plant pest – and even there, only the mauve flowering version that causes the damage as it multiplies in bright profusion.



B. davidii has been declared a danger to our primary industry, as it breeds prolifically, creating problems in pine forests.

But there are still several Buddleias that are permissible and don't create problems (they don't seed, they are sterile). They are great nectar plants.

In fact, the MBNZT has been entrusted to trial a new cultivar, *B. Silver Anniversary*, to be released later this year; we have been asked to measure how successful it is providing nectar for our butterflies – and bees too. 'Silver Anniversary' has clusters of white flowers with mustard coloured eyes and a sweet honey scent.

Bred by Peter Moore in the UK (the Keeper of the Buddleia Collection) it is being grown under licence by Lyndale Nurseries. According to the company licensed to sell the plant in the USA, the intensely silvered leaves topped with scented white flowers are great for attracting butterflies.



The stunning silver foliage is the result of a cross between *B. crispa* and *B. loricata*.

Buddleias do best in full sun in moist, well-drained, fertile soils, but are adaptable to poor soils, dry soils, and soils of various pH. They are also tolerant of heat, drought, and high humidity, making it an ideal plant for the summer.

Buddleias (sometimes spelled Buddleja) were named after the Rev Adam Buddle, a 17th century English botanist. The plant was brought from Chile, but others come from China. The name, 'summer lilac' comes from the large, fragrant upright flower panicles, similar in shape to the common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*).

The plants come in every colour imaginable – white, lavender, blue, pink, mauve, dark purple, magenta and yellow. They are a medium to large-sized shrub, growing rapidly and reaching 3-5 metres high if never pruned. Even with radical spring pruning, they can be 3 metres tall by autumn. Pruning at different seasons and in different ways

produce a variety of results.

Buddleias bloom on new wood. Pruning to about 5-10 cm just as growth is starting in the early spring is recommended if you want large flowers in the summer. Tip pruning can be done in the summer as a way to attempt to keep this rapid grower in bounds and force it to bush out more rather than grow taller. This has the added effect of holding off blooms by several weeks and making them last longer into the autumn.

The third option is not to prune at all and just let the monster go wild. This brings the earliest blooms, but flowers are smaller. Deadhead Buddleias as the flowers fade, so the small side branches form larger flower heads. This can extend the bloom time by quite a few weeks.

This aptly named shrub is known and grown mostly for its flowers, and when in full bloom can be seen covered with butterflies. It is grown mostly as a specimen plant, but when planted en masse can also be very effective.

Grey-green foliage is neutral and blends in with plants around it. When mixed with ornamental grasses, its open, gangly shape takes on a sudden gracefulness.

Some Buddleia species, like *B. alternifolia*, and *B. globosa*, bloom on last year's wood. They provide nectar for spring and early-summer butterflies, and they shouldn't be pruned until after blossoming

The Weyer x Buddleia is a hybrid cross of *B. davidii*. *B. globosa* comes in several shades of yellow and has globe-shaped flowers that bloom several weeks later than the other species. It is not quite as cold-hardy as the others and should be pruned in the early spring.

The MBNZT would like to promote the Buddleia's assets, and make sure that everyone knows it is not the hated weed that everyone thinks it is! Let's raise its

profile – and give it the PR it deserves.



Overwintering cluster in Totara tree, Christchurch - Vicky Steele

Proposed Changes to Trust Deed

Those of you who attended our AGM will be aware of the change in our direction; no longer a small, local group, lobbying to protect Butterfly Bay but a national organisation, concerned with the health and protection of the Monarch and other Lepidoptera species as well.

This discussion is on our website – where you will also find a copy of our original (current) Trust Deed. These changes will make us a much more mobile organisation.

The rules we propose changing at our Special General Meeting on Saturday, 28 July, 2pm appear below. The meeting will also be held on line – see instructions below. Proposed new text is shown in *italics*. Deletions are shown ~~struck through~~. We thank our solicitor, John Gallie, for his assistance in formulating these changes.

2. Definitions and Interpretations

~~“the district” shall mean and include the area of land recognised as being governed by the Far North District Council at the time of the establishment of the Trust;~~

3. Office

The office of the Trust shall be such place ~~in Russell of the Bay of Islands~~ as the Board determines.

4. Objects

The objects of the Trust are as follows:

- i. to raise public awareness and increase biodiversity ~~in the Far North District~~ and within New Zealand for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders;
- ii. to maintain, protect and increase biodiversity ~~in the Far North District~~ and within NZ, so that the natural habitat of the Monarch Butterfly *and other Lepidoptera species* are protected and enhanced;
- iii. to increase opportunities for members of communities and visitors ~~to NZ the Far North District~~ to enjoy and experience the Monarch Butterfly *and other Lepidoptera species* as part of the natural environment;
- iv. to encourage members of the public within other districts of NZ to protect and enhance ~~other~~ habitats of the Monarch Butterfly *and other Lepidoptera species*;
- v. to enable research groups and individuals to carry out research and education projects relevant to the Trust's objects;
- vi. to liaise with groups with similar objectives;
- vii. to seek funding support for any of the objectives of the Trust.

The objectives for which the Trust is established shall be restricted at all times to operation within New Zealand.

15.2 Notice of Meeting

Fourteen days' written notice of each General Meeting shall be given to all members of the Trust *in the newsletter*. In addition, a notice shall be ~~placed in a local newspaper circulating in the Far North District~~, and sent by email to all members who have provided their email address, together with brief details of the business to be discussed. This notice shall state that the meeting is the Annual

General Meeting or a Special General Meeting as the case may be, and shall specify the place, date and time at which the meeting is to be held. *The meeting may also be held simultaneously in an on-line conference room.*

15.3 Quorum

Ten members of the Trust *personally* present ~~personally or 50% (fifty percent) or the members, whichever is the less~~, *or by proxy* shall constitute a quorum for a General Meeting. A member that is a group or organisation shall be deemed to be personally present if it is represented at the meeting by its duly appointed nominee *or proxy*.

20. Alteration of Rules

These rules may be altered, added to, rescinded or otherwise amended by a resolution passed by a two-thirds majority of members of the Trust, including their proxies, *who are present* at a general meeting, provided that no such amendment shall:

- (a) detract from the exclusively charitable nature of the Trust or result in the distribution of its assets on winding up or dissolution for any purpose that is not exclusively charitable; or
- (b) be made to the rules unless it is first approved in writing by the Department of Inland Revenue.

This is important. If you are unable (or don't wish) to be at the meeting, please send your proxy on the flip side of your subscription which comes with this newsletter.

After the meeting there will be discussion as to the most valuable lesson learned over the past butterfly season... all will be welcome to participate.

On-line Meetings

Using your browser, go to this web address - or email Jacqui for instructions: <http://tinyurl.com/yqoq3z>

Wait a few minutes for the meeting room to load. When asked to allow access to the meeting program, click 'Allow' or 'Grant Access.'

For a nickname use 'GivenSurname', e.g. JohnSmith, so we can distinguish you easily. Type your nickname into the top line, and click on the 'Connect to StarChat' button.

A lot of script will scroll by, then you'll be in the meeting room. You should see the names of other people in a list on the right, and we will talk in the big centre box.

To talk, type in the box below the meeting room window, then hit Enter or Return on your keyboard to send your words to the screen. It's best to use short sentences, so that other people can follow the thread of what you are saying and understand you're continuing.

Email Jacqui and suggest a time when she can meet you there, to practise beforehand. During the meeting we will follow meeting protocol. We will ask those who want to say something to type in just an exclamation mark ! and then await their turn to speak. The Chair will acknowledge them in order, and so when you get the go ahead, you can type in what you want to say.

When you finish, we ask you to type in 'Over' just like in the good old days of RTs.

Tagging and Transects

Summer stayed with us well into May, and there have been few signs of Monarchs forming overwintering colonies.

125 taggers have tagged almost 10,000 Monarchs since late last year. Over 300 tagged Monarchs have been reported in to the website – and when this happens, a map of the tagged location and the found location is drawn up and sent to both parties (the tagger and the recoverer).

To date there have been flights of great distances – it seems most males stay put, patrolling their nearest milkweed patch, while females traevl within a few kilometres, leaving eggs on each milkweed plant they find.

Large clusters of Monarchs have been reported at sites at Bromley, Fendalton, and St Albans, Christchurch; Anderson Park and Georges Drive Reserve at Napier; Strandon, New Plymouth; Port Waikato; Matua, Tauranga; Kowhai Park, Wanganui; Papakowhai, Wellington and Warren Park, Whakatane – in each case the spotter is written to asking if they can send photographs and/or keep us informed of any changes to the population.

Pests reported have included ants, aphids, praying mantises, shield beetles and the most common – wasps.

We will keep monitoring the sightings; please report in any activity – of Monarchs, other butterflies and pests creating problems in your milkweed. The information you contribute is very valuable.

In the Milkweed Patch

June... almost 'midwinter'. Here in Russell Monarchs are still mating and egg-laying. There are plenty nectaring on my poinsettias and bottlebrush, and no signs here of any overwintering clusters. On the milkweed around our town, there are quite a few eggs and caterpillars and the major pest (besides the sudden changes in temperature or damp) is the praying mantis.

We need to be thinking about how we can best prepare for the next season, so that we can give the Monarchs their best chance. If your milkweed (swan plants etc) have survived the summer onslaught, it's time to prune off the dead branches and let them sprout again.

In the north we don't need to worry about **frosts**. But if you do, you'll want to ensure your plants are sheltered from the cold so that they survive the winter. Plant them against the house, in maximum sun - and offer them protection from frost if they're still susceptible.

Snails will be one of the biggest pests at present – they can quite easily ring-bark and kill your plants. If your garden is covered with a sharp mulch – such as sand – this will discourage snails, which thrive in damp gardens. You might find snails right at the top of your milkweed where they'll be enjoying the most succulent new growth. Any snails I find get tossed onto my garage roof, where the birds eat them.

Use the ashes from a wood fire around the feet of plants. Reapply after rain; this as will dry out and burn molluscs, so they won't be keen to cross them. Crushed egg shells,

baked in the oven until dry and crisp are too sharp to cross.

I once put saucers of beer down for my snails, and found that they drowned in the beer! Next morning, the snails could be fed to the birds, or go to the compost heap.

Then there's the tiny little orange **Oleander aphids** (*Aphis nerii*) (see picture over). Aphids ingest sap from their host plants, causing aesthetic damage and lowering plant. Large amounts of sticky **honeydew** is produced by the aphids, and subsequent **sooty mould** grows on the honeydew. Plants turn black, can be deformed and stunted, and with heavy infestations, will die.

A few months ago I was delighted to have a team of ladybirds come and clean them up – but now it appears my ladybirds have all gone into hibernation.

Ladybirds' scientific names (Coleoptera, meaning 'sheath-winged', and Coccinellidae, meaning 'little red sphere') can be quite a mouthful, but by whatever name you call them, ladybirds are well-known and well-loved worldwide. There are nearly 5,000 species, and they come in a wide variety of colours: red, orange, pink, yellow, black and metallic blue.

One of the most familiar ladybirds in the North Island is the steel-blue *Halmus chalybeus* (see picture over). It's an Australian species, brought here in 1899 to control black scale, but it will attack a range of other scale insects as well as aphids. They don't seem to be much affected by the seasons, and you can find them year round, particularly on citrus.

One ladybird can eat about 600 aphids in its lifetime, and about 3000 ladybirds can easily protect an entire acre of plants!

Sadly, for me, they're one of the few insects that hibernate during the winter months, emerging in the spring to lay their eggs. They've been eating aphids all summer-long, and now that the temperatures have dropped, they have sought shelter for the winter; clustering together by the hundreds under dead leaves or inside hollow logs. There they will remain until warmer temperatures return.

Meanwhile, I've taken a spray bottle and filled it with water, and I spray the aphids to knock them from their perches. I figure that those that get moved on will find it hard to get back where they were – hopefully they'll die.

I used to hand squash them, but then I realised some would have been already parasitised by *Aphidius colemanii*. This is a small (2mm), black wasp which lays its eggs inside aphids. When the larva hatches, it kills the aphid and then pupates inside it, forming a 'mummy'; they look like a brown, swollen aphid. (Hopefully the parasitised aphids which I hose off will still have *A. colemanii* emerge.)

According to John Charles at HortResearch, if we can reduce the activities of **ants** around our milkweed, the natural enemies of the aphids (ladybirds and parasites) will bring things into balance.

Scientists estimate that approximately 10% of the world's biomass is made up of ants. Ants are clever little critters – they rear insects to get honey! Insects such as aphids and scale insects release a sweet sap (honeydew), so ants farm them to obtain a supply of the sap. Have you ever heard

someone refer to aphids as 'ants' cows'? Ants carry them to the shoots that produce a large amount of sweet sap. Instead of taking the sweet sap away, the ants defend the aphids or move them to a place where a large amount of the sweet sap can be obtained!

Some time ago I bought some yellow sticky traps, to trap flying insects in my greenhouse, then realised it would also trap butterflies and *Aphidius colemanii*.

I'm going to cut them into strips and use a twist-tie to put them around the trunks of my milkweed, to see if that's an



effective tool against the ants.

This column will also be posted in the forum on our website (without the photographs) so you can contribute your own suggestions and seasonal comments. Look for 'In the Milkweed Patch'.

Jacqui

Thanks to Graham Meadows Photo Library for illustrations – contact graham@gmpl.co.nz

Great Reasons to Pay your Sub Now

You will find with this newsletter that your subscription is due at the end of June

There are benefits in renewing promptly, free gifts for the first to renew, and draws to win various products:

Click That Itch is a safe and painless treatment that helps relieve the itching and swelling caused by insect bites. The product uses piezoelectricity to generate high voltage/low intensity electrical impulses that reduce the level of irritant in the bite.



The electrical impulses stimulate blood flow through the affected area, washing away irritating or poisonous substances introduced under the skin by an insect, which reduces the swelling and itchiness of the bite.

Click That Itch has been approved by the NZ Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority (MedSafe). RRP is \$24.90.



Richmond Plains Wines is offering three gift packs, each containing three bottles (one Sauvignon, one Chardonnay and one Pinot), delivered to your home address.

And the **Terra Viva Garden Centre** in Christchurch has also offered gift vouchers to the Canterbury members resubscribing. These are just



a few of the incentives to encourage you to send in your \$20 now.

Ellerslie International Flower Show

Plans are well advanced for another display at this premium event in November – telling some 60,000+ gardeners of the need to protect, and help, NZ's butterfly species.

Isabel Harris and Jacqui are working on the display which will once again be in the Hort Galore marquee. Volunteers are needed to help with specific tasks (what are your talents? skills? expertise?) and during the course of the event, answering people's questions. We anticipate you will be on the stand 2-4 hours, and can then look around the show. Free entry for you, but no carparking can be provided.

Other members can help fold the 'giveaway' cards, and attaching wildflower seeds to the cards prior to the event. If you can help, please email Jacqui. With this newsletter comes a cut-out Monarch butterfly. Please colour it in (orange of course!), write your name address and a message on the reverse, and return it to us with your subscription; for our overwintering Monarchs clustering in a tree.

To be involved, please email jacqui@monarch.org.nz

Website, Forum and Photos

Photos can now be uploaded to the website with ease – email trust@monarch.org.nz for more information.

The forum has got screeds of information in it – a good place to post questions, to benefit from the advice of many. www.monarch.org.nz