

Dear members

So much has happened over the last three months – let me see if we can remember it all!

Thank you to all of you who sent in their subscriptions promptly. It certainly makes our life easier.

We are so sorry that we didn't have more of the seeds to go around. If you missed out, the Tropical Milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) is available from the MBNZT at \$5 a packet – either Scarlet or the Gold – if you want both, it's \$10.

Those people who were lucky enough to score in the draw, were delighted to get their 'goodies'. Winners were:

Caterpillar Cosy – Carl Watson, Whakatane

Click That Itch ® – Pam and Jack Godfrey, Hamilton

Richmond Plains Wines – Brenda & John Briand, Army Bay; John Jamieson, Dannevirke; and Bryan Vasey, Nelson.

Terra Viva Garden Centre vouchers – Janet Bainbridge, Ilam; Dean & Lois Farrow, Riccarton; John McCammon, Papanui.

T-shirt – Cherrie Holder, Kaitaia

At the time of writing we have 401 members – and people are joining up every day. It is always wonderful to get messages of encouragement, although we don't always have the time to respond. Please excuse us if your letter has not been answered.

If you are keen to become involved in any of our projects, we would love to have you on board. There's tagging and walking transects. Then there's helping us put together our display and/or being on the stand at the Ellerslie International Flower Show.

We are keen to work in other areas too – tell us if/where you'd like to help.

The Mazda Foundation has very generously supported us in our work with another \$8,000 donation. This will help us hugely in our work. We are awaiting the outcomes of other funding applications and donations are always welcomed.

Edith, Gilly, Jacqui, Shelley & Vicky

Can You Help Us?

We probably have all seen pictures of overwintering clusters – see the photo overleaf of one in the Bay of Plenty – but many people do not know that our beautiful Monarch butterflies cluster together to survive the winter, and thus when they emerge in the spring they will start a new generation.

We have one opportunity to promote the need to protect our butterflies at this year's Ellerslie International Flower Show, and to make impact we want to replicate an overwintering cluster.

Would you help us?

For this display to be effective, we need HUNDREDS of colourful paper Monarchs for our display at Ellerslie. We have a template on our website: <http://monarch.org.nz/template>.

The Monarchs can be coloured in in shades of orange, but any media can be used and the range should be hugely effective – a work of art. We want them from all over New Zealand, to show that New Zealanders care about the future of our butterflies.

Would you spread the word at your local school? For every butterfly contributed, schools and clubs etc will go into the draw to win seeds, books and other butterfly resources.

Full instructions are on the website.

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C/- NZ Post
Russell 0242

Telephone
09 403 8543

Email:
info@monarch.org.nz

Website:
www.monarch.org.nz



The Forest Ringlet - photo George Gibbs

We were concerned to hear that the Forest Ringlet (*Dodonidia helmsii*) had been moved from the 'Gradual Decline' to the 'Serious Decline' list by the Department of Conservation earlier this year.

According to the Minister for Conservation, a concerted survey effort indicates that this butterfly has disappeared from lowland sites, despite plentiful habitat. Very small remnant populations remain at high altitudes, and vespid wasp predation is a possible cause of the decline.

We hope that some funding is being spent to find out why this butterfly is less common than it once was – but at this point we do not know.

There is a great deal of information about the Forest Ringlet in the 'bible' for NZ lepidopterists, NZ Butterflies : Identification and Natural History, author George Gibbs, who is a Research Associate at Victoria University.

This butterfly is most common where sedges (*Gahnia paucifolia*) are abundant and is on the wing in late December-early January (Mamaku Plateau, North Island)

The butterfly is relatively unknown because of its short season, dependence on sunshine for activity and high level treetop flight. George says it needs to be looked for in the right place at the right time.

It is most unlikely that it would be seen in your domestic garden; but if you see the \$1 NZ postage stamp from 1991, you can see it there. It has been found at scattered localities in forested hill country throughout the North Island and in the north of the South Island, and ranges from close to sea level up to the treeline at about 1000 metres, often in beech forest or mixed beech/kamahi.

If you are restoring land with native plantings in these areas you may want to include their host plants: *Gahnia pauciflora*, a bright green sedge with brown fruiting heads rising to about 1mm high – a common species in beech forest. At higher elevations (Mt Ruapehu or Goulund Downs, Nelson) their major foodplant is *G. procera*, a slightly smaller, dull green sedge. Eggs and larvae have also been found on two species of Forest Tussock, *Chionochloa conspicua* and *C. cheesemanii* (Hunangamoho) in the South Island.

Changes in our Trust

In July our Trust Deed was changed so that we can now officially address the protection of all NZ Lepidoptera, all over the country (without the Far North focus).

The Minutes of that meeting can be seen here:

<http://tinyurl.com/2h6aah> – or we will mail you a copy if you would like it in a paper form (we want to save paper).

On looking at our Trust Deed, you will note our focus is equally divided between education/research, and the protection of habitat and species. Many opportunities to fulfil our objectives have been identified, and the following are some of them.

We are already well advanced in our plans for the Ellerslie International Flower Show. This will be held between 14 and 18 November, at the Auckland Regional Council Botanic Gardens about ten minutes south of Auckland city. More about this in a separate section of this newsletter.

We are also making plans for the Butterfly Project (tagging and transects) in future years and more people indicate they are keen to help us gather data.

We want to develop resource kits, not only for members who would like to become (or are) educators going into schools, but also for schools to use when they are planning lessons around butterflies and butterfly gardens.

We are also keen to promote the various plants – both host plants and nectar plants – so that gardeners have a better understanding of what Lepidoptera need.

With regards to the protection and encouragement of Lepidoptera and/or habitat, we are supporting the group which is creating a butterfly garden at Te Puna Quarry Park Gardens (Bay of Plenty) and are also exploring ways in which we can help the Forest Ringlet and Cinnabar Moth. Some members are keen to see a butterfly garden created in the Auckland Region... Would you like to get together with people in your community and have a butterfly garden?

There are many areas in which we could work, but for now we intend to focus on those which are described above. If you would like to assist us, you would be very welcome.

Helping us to advance these projects will be the Teacher Fellows, courtesy of the Royal Society of NZ (see separate article). And there will be a two-day conference at the end of January, in Russell, Bay of Islands. More information to come. Please join the google group to receive regular updates.

Tagging and Transects

Over the winter we have had reports of overwintering sites in parks and large groupings of trees in various parts of NZ – mostly they are in cities on the eastern seaboard. Does this mean that our Monarchs migrate to the Pacific Coast? Or does it mean that no-one on the Tasman Sea side of NZ has been making reports? We don't know – this will be discussed at our Conference in January, and also further monitored by our RSNZ fellows.

We will begin tagging late summer 2008 – it is the Monarchs that go into diapause that we want to monitor.

In the Milkweed Patch

Garden centres and seed merchants report that their sales of milkweed (mostly Swan plant) have risen dramatically since the inception of the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust.

Hopefully in your garden you will have some Swan plants surviving from last year, or will be encouraging seedlings. Remember that the MBNZT has seeds of three other species to help you in your garden:

Gomphocarpus physocarpus – Giant Swan plant, much more vigorous than the Swan plant. ***Asclepias curassavica*** – Tropical Milkweed (Scarlet flowers, sometimes called Bloodflower) and ***A. curassavica*** – Tropical Milkweed (Gold flowers). We ask for a \$5 donation for each packet.

Below are some remedies to control predators which will affect your butterfly population at this time of the year (snails, slugs, aphids destroy milkweed). If you have a favourite, chemical-free remedy, please let us know – we would love you to share your ideas with us. And if you find any of these remedies don't work, or are particularly successful, we'd like to hear that too!

Snails and slugs will quickly ring-bark and kill your milkweed. Sarah, who runs an organic gardening business in Auckland called Patch from Scratch (www.patchfromscratch.co.nz), offers these tips:

“The good old beer trap can work well, as can making a little frost net or cloche so they can't physically get to the seedling. I leave dead ones to rot in the garden; last year I think this had some bearing on the reduction in numbers. They don't like broken eggshell so put that around the base of plants.”

Aphids are already at work on my milkweed. Sarah says she removes them with an old toothbrush and warm soapy water. She also uses a garlic spray (four crushed cloves, straining through a tea-strainer into her spray bottle) – top up with water. Spray gets stronger with age. She also plants Marigolds which attract hoverflies – and of course the nectar of Marigolds would delight the Monarchs too. Nasturtiums are also said to deter aphids and whitefly.

Another book about organic gardening tells me aphids detest plants grown in organically rich soil. Another idea is to make a trap of a bright yellow pan (Sunlight lid?) and fill with detergent water, attracting aphids which then drown.

Be vigilant with **Ants**, as they encourage the aphids, and as the health of your milkweed deteriorates, other problems like sooty mould and whitefly soon become frequent. According to Sarah, they hate lemon juice/rind, but this will need to be reapplied after rain. Ants can also indicate the soil is too dry.

Remember to encourage **Ladybirds**, but not the **Praying mantis** which delights in eating your caterpillars also.

Wasps are already at work around caterpillars, and look to be the biggest predator for all butterflies. Are they the cause of our diminished Forest Ringlet population?

Has anyone got a proven wasp trap? Please share your wasp remedies and successes with us...

Ellerslie International Flower Show

Our display for this premium event in November is on track. Many people have offered their ideas for this display which will once again be in the Hort Galore marquee. Volunteers are needed:

Would you like to work on the stand during the event? You will work a few hours, and then be able to see the show.

Would you like to help set up the display? Or dismantle it?

Would you be able to attach wildflower seeds to the giveaway cards for the show? This task would suit Auckland people.

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

Would you like to take away a banana box of mixed plants at the end of the show? Some will be *Asclepias curassavica*, but mainly they will be nectar plants that have been used in our rainbow of colour. They will be available from a Manukau address, and we are asking \$15 for nine plants, prepaid. More details nearer the show – please email eifs@monarch.org.nz or send an email address with your payment/order.

Website: Forum and Photos

Registered users can now send photos to the website easily – attach a low resolution version to an email and send it with a short description.

photos@monarch.org.nz

On our website you can register for the forum, or as a tagger. The forum has screeds of information posted by members – a good place for learning from others.

Also read inside about our google group, another way of networking.

www.monarch.org.nz

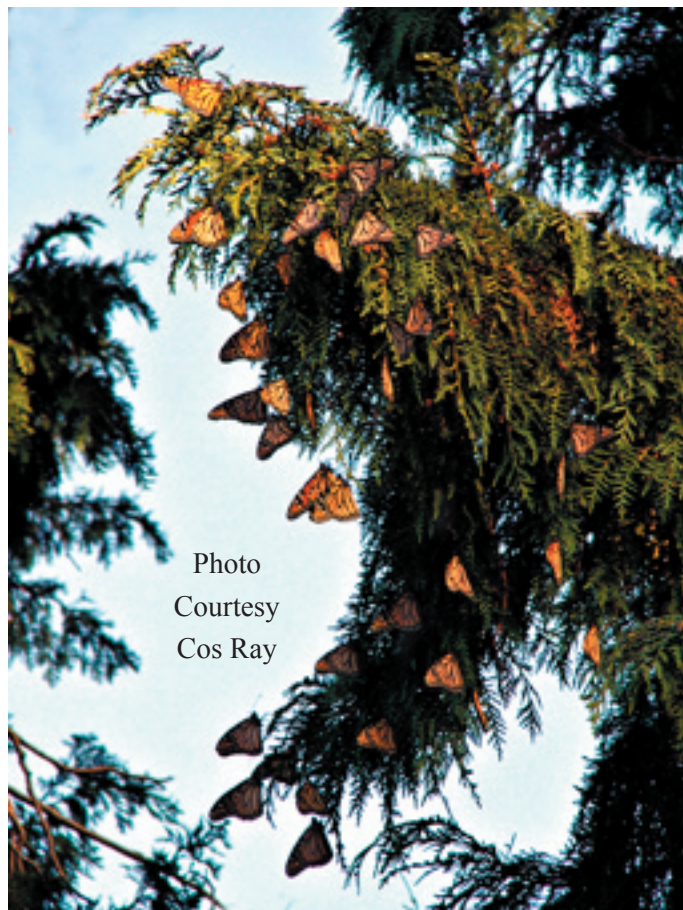


Photo
Courtesy
Cos Ray

Royal Society Teacher Fellows all set to go

Three primary teachers with an interest in research and environmental education will work with us on the tagging project next year, Terms 1 and 2. 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.

The three teachers are:

Roseanne Andrew, from South Auckland who currently teaches a class of 8-9 year olds.



“I grew up in North Otago and vividly remember the few swan plants in our garden and the Monarchs that used to visit. However, I don’t recall seeing large numbers of them until I came to live in Auckland.”

It was when she bought a couple of swan plants which soon became many more she developed a fascination and interest in the Monarch.

“I have spent many hours observing and trying to protect them from their predators, especially wasps,” she said. “As a teacher, I really enjoy teaching the children science topics, especially those related to ‘The Living World’ (plants and animals).”

Roseanne has witnessed the interest and enthusiasm children have in these topics as they find them easy to observe and experience. She says the fellowship offers her a wonderful opportunity to not only grow in my own knowledge of the Monarch, but to help foster within the children and community, the need to conserve this butterfly (and others) and its environment in NZ.

“I am looking forward to being a part of this special project in order to help protect and learn more about this wonderful species.”

Cherie Harris, 48 years old, lives in Christchurch with her 22-year-old son Jeremy, two-year-old Boxer Dieter, cat Teddie, birds and fish – both cold water and tropical.

Her Dad started her fascination with Monarchs – especially the year he had to feed them pumpkin because the plants were stripped bare!

“I remember their droppings turned pumpkin orange!”

Cherie has been teaching at Aorangi School for the past 12 years. Aorangi is a small school and over the years she has watched children become enthralled with Monarchs, with plants scattered around the grounds – even having them in the classrooms to hatch out.

“This year has seen this excitement continue—especially



with our 5 year olds,” she said. “We had a small number of swan plants growing in the 2006 Leavers Garden and the children would check out the plants every playbreak.”

“We are building a new school and one of our projects is to build a butterfly garden to attract a wide variety of butterflies (including Monarchs). As part of the fellowship one of my goals is to develop the butterfly house in conjunction with the butterfly garden and to develop resources for children to use to learn about NZ butterflies, what plants they are attracted to, their life cycles etc.”

“Having watched Monarchs over the years at school and at home, I’ve often wondered what happened to them in Winter – this project will give me the chance to find out!”

The third Teacher Fellow is **Lesley Standish-Wing**, based in the Bay of Islands, also very excited about next year.

“I can remember as a child being fascinated watching the butterflies hatch. I look forward to learning more about them.”

Lesley teaches at Okaihau Primary, and has just completed her degree by doing online papers at Waikato University. Last year she introduced an edible garden to the school – and the design won third place at the Ellerslie Flower Show.

“I travelled with nine pupils down to Ellerslie to collect the prize,” she said. “They still talk about it. I feel that Science and Environmental Education are an important part of the curriculum. Children need to know about what is happening around them.”



She is married to Neil and lives in Kerikeri where they own a kiwifruit orchard. They have two daughters – Anna is in her first year at Auckland

University, doing a Biomedical Degree and Lauren is in Year 12 at Kerikeri High School.

“We have lots of pets; these include Patrick and Honey the cats, Jack the dog, Chinese silky bantams, doves and goldfish.”

You’re in great company, Lesley, we’re all animal lovers.

Discussion Group for those on email

Ever wish you could have questions about butterflies answered within minutes – or hours – of asking them? Then our ‘google group’ may well be the answer. Many members have signed up, and it’s FREE. Here’s how it works:

You send one email to mbnzt@googlegroups.com. When the email arrives at the server, it is sent to everyone signed up for the group. Soon, someone will answer your question, and will email everyone else.

Right now I am learning so much about Admirals and other butterflies, from those who have been encouraging them for many years. It’s also great to be able to contribute and share my knowledge with others.

Sign up now! It’s a great way of learning more.

<http://tinyurl.com/2zbk38>