

Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust – Report on Conference, April 2009, Tauranga

With considerable hard work put in by a small committee, comprising of Mary Parkinson, Jacqui Knight, Doreen Anderson, Jo Dawkins, Anderley Middleton, Cos Ray and Stephanie Wynne, the 2009 Conference proved a great success. Held over two days at Easter (11 and 12 April) sessions ran for the two full days.

PROGRAMME

After registration, Mary Parkinson welcomed the attendees, and introduced the speakers. Jacqui Knight followed, speaking about the history of the MBNZT, its aims and plans for the future, and then greetings messages from around the world were shared – including Don Davis (Monarch Network, Canada), Zane Greathouse, the President of IBBA, and noted TV naturalist David Bellamy.

Madam Butterfly followed, with a presentation on Metamorphosis. After a break there were two 30-minute workshops. with half the attendees going to Tagging with Jacqui Knight and the other half Raising Admirals at Home with Norm Twigge

After lunch Keynote Speaker George Gibbs was introduced. He spoke on the Origin of New Zealand's butterflies and moths. This was followed by Barrie Frost from Canada who spoke on Migration and Navigation and the Importance of Tagging.

After afternoon tea, Mark Hauber from the University of Auckland spoke on migration of animals, how it can be measured and shared the results of Tagging in NZ This was followed by Alan Emmerson who introduced us to some NZ Moths before a visit to Te Puna Quarry Park for a visit to the butterfly garden, a picnic tea and Bio Blitz.

The next day began with a lucky number draw – and those who were present in the conference room on time came up to collect a prize. Kathryn Rowe, principal of Elsthorpe School in the Hawkes Bay spoke about teaching with Monarchs and environmental education.

Promptly at 9.30am the conference adjourned for the Annual General Meeting of the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust, and then Kathryn was invited to continue her presentation.

At 11am two half-hour workshops took place – one on Striking Cuttings with Jo Dawkins and Mary Parkinson; and the other on seed collection with Jacqui Knight. A paper was circulated on establishing a habitat project.

After lunch Peter Maddison spoke on Pests, Geoff Brunsten from Wildflower World spoke about nectar for NZ butterflies, and at 3pm George Gibbs gave an idea of how to take photographs of butterflies and moths.

The conference wound up from 4pm onwards, with presentations and thanks. The two days were a huge success, only made possible through the generous support of sponsors, speakers and considerable hard work from the Conference Committee, and in particular Mary Parkinson and Jacqui Knight. Sponsors were Environment Bay of Plenty, Perry Foundation, Ron Greenwood Trust, Te Puna Quarry Park, Tui Products, Western Bay of Plenty Council and Wildflower World.

FINANCIALS

With the sale of MBNZT items, raffles and auctions boosting the proceeds from the event – and the generous donation of speakers' time and travel – the MBNZT funds looked healthy at the conclusion of the event. This could not have been done without the support and confidence of our sponsors.

EVALUATION

When asked what they wished to gain from the conference, and if their needs were met, attendees said:

- Better knowledge of butterflies and related activities
- Listen to expert speakers (entomologists etc) internationally/nationally recognised.
- Knowledge and ideas – really enjoyed all the speakers' passion for their subject and range
- General information and sharing and meeting like-minded – yes
- More practical knowledge about creating a butterfly garden and controlling pests. Yes, my needs were met.
- Learning about butterflies, plants and pests – yes.
- Nil expectations.
- Wanted to learn more, meet people with same interests, have a relaxing weekend – all accomplished.
- Further knowledge of Monarch biology.
- How you set up an interactive website forum.
- Intro understanding of biology of butterflies and raising of Monarchs and Admirals and suitable habitat at home – all very interesting (great speakers!)
- How a community garden came about.
- Knowledge of rearing natives – some knowledge but not a lot
- Monarch projects for schools – yes.
- A better understanding of Monarchs and their cycles and habits. My needs were met.
- To get more information on different things. Yes I learned a lot.
- To learn more about the Monarchs and plenty for the garden to attract them, as well as photography.
- Making awareness to the benefits.
- I knew nothing and gain knowledge from every speaker. I thought the balance of the days was great.
- Lots of info about raising butterflies, their scientific background. Extremely well covered – fantastic.
- Wonderful meeting other butterfly enthusiasts.
- General knowledge about butterflies, how to attract/grow gardens that supports butterflies, butterflies that are native/endemic – yes!
- I wanted to meet other people who were interested in conserving NZ butterflies, especially Admirals and Ringlets. Yes, needs met.
- Meeting people with the same interest – yes.

Attendees were also positive about the length of notice they had to make plans to attend the event. They told us where they had found out about the event:

- When first advertised; yes.
- Poster at Mega Mitre 10 – ages ago.

- Internet search
- One year ago.
- 2008
- A couple of months ago – yes (just)
- There were also notices on the noticeboard (at work)
- November, I think – at garden centres.
- Months ago; yes.
- Through the newsletter and yes there was enough time.
- By email – plenty of time.
- Word of mouth.
- When it was published on the website – yes, it was enough time.
- Last year – yes.
- Magazine.
- Through the MBNZT newsletter and Mary Parkinson rang me, which was great.
- February 2009 – yes.
- Read about it in newsletters. Yes, timing was good.
- Last year, yes there was enough time.
- Last year, 2008, plenty of time to plan accommodation.
- On the website – yes.
- A year ago – yes. x 2
- Early March – yes.

We were told that communications were clear and precise:

- Yes x 12
- All good
- Prompt, very helpful
- It would have been good to have been reminded to bring a good torch to the moth trapping.
- They were clear and precise.
- All the info. needed was clear and precise and in an attractive format.
- Excellent in all aspects!
- No map details for venue (Google maps got the location wrong!)
- No problem.
- Very clear and precise.
- Fine.
- I received another phone call from Mary and so communication was great.

Attendees also felt that they got value for money:

- Yes x 10
- Definitely
- Yes, the sharing of experts' knowledge – that was priceless.
- Certainly, and more – wonderful informative content, particularly from all the speakers.
- More than expected!
- Definitely.
- Yes, indeed, the guest speakers were outstanding.
- Absolutely x 2.
- The conference was paid for by my teacher registration funding. I am not sure I could have afforded it myself.

- Certainly.

They felt that the conference would appeal to a wide range of people.

- I am a teacher and I am excited about the possibilities of getting more teachers involved.
- Gardeners
- Teachers
- Teachers – but difficult to reach them, and for them to get school funding.
- Everyone, as wide as you can go – which is what we tried to do.
- Parents
- Nature lovers
- Environmental organisations x 3/all kinds of environmental community groups – maybe reach through libraries or regional councils.
- IHC?? Would be very productive in schools/prisons.
- Rudolph Steiner teachers – may be especially interested.
- Younger people too – to teenagers?
- Hobbyists x 2
- Insect societies x 2
- University departments x 2
- Butterfly conservation
- Councils
- Landscape designers
- Ministry of Environment
- Department of Conservation
- Kiwi Conservation Club
- Artists
- All New Zealanders
- NIWA
- AgResearch
- Environment BOP
- Environment Waikato
- ARC
- Greypower
- Polytechs, schools
- Forest & Bird
- Conservationists
- Museum members
- Other community groups
- Animal lovers
- Murumi – some may in fact host a conference if it links into an exhibition – may require good luck!
- Wide range of audience but with niche market workshops for teachers.
- Any breathing entity.
- It was nice that sponsor organisations were encouraged to attend with complimentary attendance.
- Access to huge client database from garden centres.
- Yes, but also as wide an audience as possible – you never know who's interested and why!

There was a mixed response to the timing for the conference, and as to what would be the best time if we were to hold more:

- Yes x 3
- All good
- Two days is plenty. It is a bit exhausting and enjoyed the relaxed style/informal approach, thanks
- Fine x 2
- Over the weekend was good.
- Easter would be about the worst possible time for me. My family has been very gracious to let me come.
- Earlier in the year, January holidays, school holidays. Easter getting a bit late for butterflies – especially if you go south.
- Prefer not Easter or Christmas
- Easter is good (or any long weekend when butterflies are still around)
- Easter – good
- Yes – good – or any other weekend – spring/summer is good too.
- Okay for me, but suspect it (Easter) is not such a good time for families who often go away together at this time.
- This time was fine but as I'm retired I'm flexible – anytime.
- Okay.
- Easter holidays perhaps not good timing – what about third term school holidays in October or early Dec?
- Probably NOT at Easter – I suspect this may have stopped a lot of attendees.
- Easter not the best time – maybe February.
- Maybe not Easter.
- Easter was a problem for me. I had to make considerable personal sacrifice to get here.
- Possibly Easter weekend was an unfortunate weekend, otherwise the time of year was nice.

The comments about the venue were mostly favourable:

- Venue must have access to internet.
- The venue was okay. Shame about wireless internet reception.
- Venue was okay. Real coffee would be good.
- Yes – coffee was nice, good snacks, especially mince and cheese savouries. REALLY good snacks. ☺
- Good
- Check for internet connection and be aware of other activities in the area.
- Nice
- Very handy for me
- It was a good size and the 'wide' room gave excellent viewing. Could have been heated a bit though.
- Yes x 5
- Magnificent.
- Lovely
- Venue was okay. It would have been better to be able to get broadband access in rooms.
- Fine.
- A very successful/friendly/welcoming venue.
- Okay.

- Fine – plenty of parking, eh!
- Great venue.
- Great choice.
- The venue provided all that was required.

We asked for ideas as to how to make future conferences even more of a success:

- Wonderful local team – good teamwork.
- I'm an early childhood teacher. It would have been great to have a workshop for EC teachers. Maybe run at the same time as other education workshops so people could choose the appropriate level.
- Perhaps distribute swan plant seedlings/cuttings (at a good price?) and other flora that attract/sustain native/Monarch butterflies.
- I felt the morning and afternoon programmes ought to be completely swapped so that the scientific subjects/speakers were in the morning while we were all fresh and the more 'hands on' subjects – tagging etc – were in the afternoon. Programme timing needs more fine tuning – would have been a bit chaotic if there had been a crowd! Wonderful work though – the above comments are just fine tuning. Thanks to the organisers.
- Really important to keep the technical/scientific input, e.g. the tagging, navigation, origins were by far the most interesting sessions for me. For future conferences you need to make sure results of tagging available and conservation work rather than just how schools/communities can be educated.
- Perhaps inform attendees that you can bring your children along? (Older ones that may appreciate it was well)? at a slightly lower 'children's safe' price? (Be good to involve younger ones if they are interested?)
- Could have done with two more helpers at least – ten for 40 is preference.
- Needed a MC full-time.
- Must have access to separate bank account, and have treasurer in place early on (as soon as funding is sought)
- Possibly a bit cheaper to involve more people. Possibly a North Island/South Island version, in a central location.
- Dunedin Museum has a subtropical exhibition that would complement this conference – given 10,000s of people have already seen the exhibition. Alternatively, other butterfly houses could complement the conference.
- Hamilton, Thames Butterfly & Orchid House
- Have speakers in early morning, activities as spell breaks and part of afternoon's schedule
- Keep to schedule (8.30-4pm is a tiring day)
- To get more teachers, maybe a day on the Friday of a working day, then get them hooked for Saturday/Sunday events for amateur/professional butterfly enthusiasts.
- You did great this time. Wonderful speakers. Good venue – well organised by lots of preparation work.
- Perhaps different sequence of "light" hands-on activity, passive and "heavier" academic/listening sessions.
- Computer issues should have been worked out before time. Microphone not going.
- I would like to see *tangata whenua* included in the conference, with relevance to the importance to the local people.
- Great to get a goodie bag.
- Awesome speakers.
- Equipment needs testing before delivery, i.e. microphone, internet access.

- Perhaps hold it in a main centre if you want more people attending – but perhaps not at Easter.
- Visit to look for native butterflies – coastal areas.
- It was a very successful conference.
- Speakers tended to be too long-winded and not always enough time for questions.
- If ½ hour slot insist speaker take twenty minutes max. actually speaking.
- Just a great pity that there weren't ten times the attendees. You all deserved it. A great job well done – congratulations!
- This conference was very well organised. Should have a good hour for the lunch-break.
- Perhaps incorporate more heritage/organic.
- Gardening themes into whole package.
- I really enjoyed the balance of the experts and amateurs, the quality of the speakers were outstanding – would rival any conference in science. The field trip was great. The workshops great. You need to determine if you want large numbers or small numbers of attendees – the places you choose favour the butterflies or convenience of doing a conference.
- The conference was very well organised and most enjoyable and informative. Beyond my expectations. Well done. I do wonder about having a conference in the South Island when there is such a strong group in the North Island. Would everyone travel to the South? Wellington perhaps? Auckland may be a busy city but it also has many resources we could tap into.
- Hold every second year. Consider local (maybe South Island meetings) in years when there is no NZ-wide conference.

Mary and I feel that two years' lead time is needed to have an event like this. Few of our committee, although they supported the event, could put in the time, energy and dedication that Mary and I did. I think we need a larger area with more financial members – and therefore more people who can volunteer their time. For instance, you need a full-time MC. Sales of conference products (e.g. papers or videos) can best be effected at the time – not weeks after the event.

If someone was going to organise a conference in 2011, they need to be putting their hands up now.

Jacqui Knight/Mary Parkinson
8 May 2009