

Lane County Butterfly Club Policy Concerning Monarch Butterflies and Milkweed

Many websites now promote captive rearing of monarch caterpillars in order to save the species. It was even featured as part of the story in a popular movie (*May December*). Long ago both Xerces Society and NABA National came out against the purchase of monarchs in any life stage because large-scale captive rearing can spread disease to wild populations and large-scale release of monarchs can distort data on population monitoring. Xerces has also come out against collection of monarch eggs and caterpillars for captive rearing except for small numbers to enable tagging.

In order to do captive rearing, people need to have large quantities of milkweed leaves. Many people are growing and feeding non-native milkweeds for this purpose. Studies have shown that if monarchs eat some species of non-native milkweeds, they will have increased parasite loads which can lead to illness or death. Even if monarch caterpillars are captive reared on native milkweeds, they still may suffer illness, disorientation, and genetic changes from not growing up under normal photoperiod and weather conditions and not eating a living, growing plant.

Our club has had speakers in the past with different perspectives on all these issues. Well-intentioned people are confused about what is best for monarchs and other butterflies. Our club has researched and discussed these issues and adopted the following policy.

1. The Lane County Butterfly Club is opposed to the commercial sale of any butterfly species in any life stage (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly.)
2. If you find a butterfly in any life stage, it is best to leave it where you found it unless you know that area is under imminent danger of being sprayed with insecticides or destroyed by agriculture or development.
3. The best way to ensure that butterflies survive and thrive is to stop using insecticides, protect existing butterfly habitat, and grow more butterfly habitat (native nectar plants and caterpillar food plants.) Different butterfly species need different plants, so learn which butterflies are in your area and which plants they need.
4. Monarch caterpillars can feed only on milkweed, but there are many different species of milkweed. We encourage you to only grow the milkweed species which are native to your area. In the Southern Willamette Valley, our native milkweeds are Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*) and Narrow-leaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*.)
5. We are opposed to growing tropical milkweeds for monarch caterpillars. Studies show these plants can be harmful to monarchs.
6. The only reasons (besides #2 above) that we support for removing monarch eggs or caterpillars from the wild and rearing them in cages are for educational purposes and to tag the adult monarchs in order to collect migration data. We support captive rearing for these reasons on a small scale only .
7. If captive rearing of monarchs is to be done, we support making it as natural as possible by keeping the cage outdoors under natural weather and photoperiod and feeding growing native milkweed plants rather than cut stems (build the cage around the plant.)