



Grand Monarchs

- *Monarch Butterflies visit the Grand Hotel every year* -



At the Grand... Butterflies are Free

The Grand Hotel has a long list of visitors who come to the hotel year after year to enjoy the many amenities offered. But one large group of travelers holds the record for the number of visits – the beautiful Monarch Butterflies which stop by each year in October and November on their way from Canada and areas east to the Yucatan Peninsula's Sierra Madre Mountains.

The Grand's grounds crews say the pretty “travelers” come to the Grand because of its beautifully manicured grounds and lush gardens, and while that's surely a factor, Mother Nature must get part of the credit too.

The Monarchs are on a 3,000-mile journey to the South and always pause their journey here on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. Here they rest and feed, gaining body weight and energy for the trip across the Gulf of Mexico. The Monarch migration is one of science's great mysteries. How do they know the route?

Entomologists believe they “follow the food,” recognizing the all-important milkweed, seaside goldenrod and red clover by color and scent. They may also navigate by the sun and the Earth's magnetic forces.

The Monarch travels south only in the daylight and may cover up to 80 miles in a single day. Cruising speed is 10-12 mph, but they are capable of sprinting up to 85 mph when threatened. Their southbound odyssey is in large groups at relatively low altitudes; however, the return journey is generally solo, at higher altitudes and at higher speeds, both night and day. They rarely stop on the northbound (spring) migration as the all-important goal is for the females to reach the egg-laying fields as early as possible.

Many of the Grand's regular guests choose the Monarch time frame to visit with cameras and binoculars in hand. Teachers bring students to the grounds and report sightings to a national register, which tracks the annual migration.

It's true that “butterflies are free” at the Grand – free for the viewing and free to move on to their next destination.

Source: *Monarchs – GRAND TIMES*
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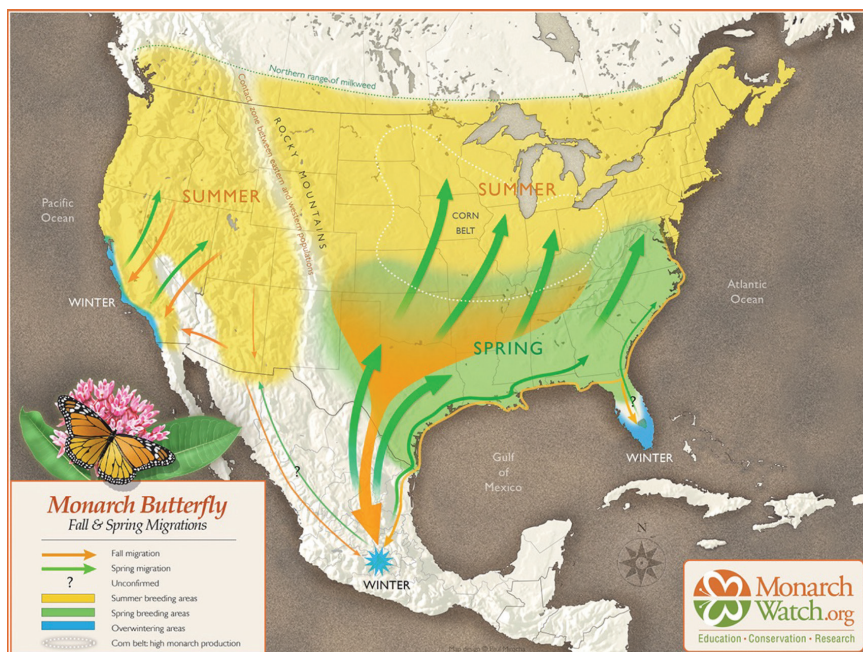


Fall Migration (September - November). This figure is an interpretation of the routes taken by Monarchs during the fall migration. The pathways are based on tag recoveries and observations of Migrating Monarchs.

When the late summer and early fall Monarchs emerge from their pupae, or chrysalides, they are biologically and behaviorally different from those emerging in the summer. The shorter days and cooler air of late summer trigger changes. In Minnesota this occurs around the end of August. Even though these butterflies look like summer adults, they won't mate or lay eggs until the following spring. Instead, their small bodies prepare for a strenuous flight. Otherwise solitary animals, they often cluster at night while moving ever southward. If they linger too long, they won't be able to make the journey; because they are cold-blooded, they are unable to fly in cold weather.

Fat, stored in the abdomen, is a critical element of their survival for the winter. This fat not only fuels their flight of one to three thousand miles, but must last until the next spring when they begin the flight back north. As they migrate southwards, Monarchs stop to nectar, and they actually gain weight during the trip! Some researchers think that Monarchs conserve their "fuel" in flight by gliding on air currents as they travel south. This is an area of great interest for researchers; there are many unanswered questions about how these small organisms are able to travel so far.

Another unsolved mystery is how Monarchs find the overwintering sites each year. Somehow they know their way, even though the butterflies returning to Mexico or California each fall are the great-great-grandchildren of the butterflies that left the previous spring. No one knows exactly how their homing system works; it is another of the many unanswered questions in the butterfly world.





One Grand Blvd | Point Clear, Alabama 36564 | grand1847.com