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Become a citizen scientist to help the Monarch Butterfly

By Bill Teeter

Information is critical to the effort to preserve the Monarch butterfly. The more scientists know about the butterfly and its movements, the better the chances are of finding ways to boost its numbers.

This situation allows opportunities for our residents to help gather information for researchers. To get more information researchers enlist the help of non-scientists to fill them in on what they see related to the Monarch, whether it be butterflies, milkweed plants, Monarch eggs or caterpillars.

With Horseshoe Bay standing in the middle of the eastern Monarch's migratory path, we are well-placed to help out in observing Monarchs. Our residents can do so by registering with journeynorth.org, a web-

site where regular folks can log their Monarch sightings during the regular fall and spring migrations.

We should start seeing some southbound Monarchs in a few weeks as the fall migration cranks up.

Participation in journeynorth.org is free and all you need is an email address and to set up a password on the site.

The information you give the site allows scientists clues about what the butterflies are up to and when and where. This can help build or improve strategies to preserve the Monarch. If you see a Monarch, note the time, location and date and promptly enter it on the website.

If you are able to take photos of your sightings you can post those, as well.

Then, if you want to get hands on with the butterflies – gently of

course -- you can also get Monarch tagging kits. The kits have tiny tags you can attach to the wings which will also help show their movements during migration.

Tagging kits can be ordered online for \$15 from the non-profit Monarch conservation group Monarch Watch at shop.monarch-watch.org. Be sure and pickup up a butterfly net while you are at it for easy catching. The nets can be found at monarchwatch.org for \$22.

By searching online for "butterfly nets" you can find other sources to purchase them from, and also instructions about how to make them.

If you take part in tagging, you will be expected to record data about the tags you apply and submit it to Monarch Watch.

The Monarch migrates from Mexico to areas along the U.S.

Canadian border in the spring and returns to Mexico in the fall.

A large decline in population numbers has vexed the Monarch for some 30 years. Their numbers are a small fraction of what they were in the 1990s. The decline is severe enough that there is consideration by U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials for listing the Monarch as a threatened species.

To help out the City of Horseshoe Bay participates in the Mayors Monarch Pledge. The Pledge is a national effort by the National Wildlife Federation to get local governments and related groups to take action to boost Monarch numbers.

Besides contributing their observations as citizen scientists, we encourage our residents to help by planting plenty of flowers on their properties for nectar. We also encourage the planting of native milkweed such as green

or antelope's horn milkweed. Milkweed is critical to the Monarch life cycle, because it is the only plant on which it lays its eggs.

Milkweed seeds can be planted in late fall for germination in the spring. Also, in the spring check nurseries for milkweed seedlings to plant. Milkweed seeds will be available at City Hall beginning Sept. 1.

As part of its Pledge participation, the City avoids mowing on certain areas of the City in the spring until mid-June to avoid destroying milkweed which may harbor Monarch eggs, chrysalis' or caterpillars. The mowing delay also allows the milkweed seed pods to break open and spread seeds.

Bill Teeter is the City of Horseshoe Bay's water conservation specialist.