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## For Immediate Release

### Monarch Premigration Memories

Goldenrods, asters, butterflies - is fall your favorite time of the year? **Your Lexington Chapter of Wild Ones wants to share another little known fact about the upcoming monarch migration .**

Were you saddened last year to see so few monarchs in your yard? Drought had devastated milkweed and nectar sources in the south, and intense heat had desiccated eggs in many areas and driven the monarchs further north. But, like clock-work, the premigrants arrived and you probably started to find eggs in early to mid-August.

This year, again, you may have seen few monarchs all summer, and may have heard only a few reports from anyone in your area about finding evidence of monarch activity. The southern drought had continued, and little milkweed was available for monarchs heading north into Texas this spring. On top of that, monarchs migrating north along the central flyway were greeted with unusually cold weather, which stalled the northward migration and prolonged larval development. Our record-low monarch population met less than ideal conditions this spring that most likely impaired their ability to reproduce in strong numbers over the summer—have you seen a monarch this year?

Now it is late summer. Are you finally seeing monarchs in your yard laying eggs (ovipositing)? Some monarchs may appear to be freshly hatched (eclosed), indicating they are from the local area. But others may appear worn. You may find them to be very skittish as they crawl through bushes searching for the choicest milkweed upon which to lay their eggs. These worn monarchs are most likely premigrants arriving here ahead of the usual fall migration.

What is premigration migration?

For the past 15 years or so, Dr. Chip Taylor of Monarch Watch has been referring to a “premigration migration,” a migration of reproductive monarchs that moves south beginning in late July. Dr. Taylor made several observations of monarchs moving southward in late July, and noted that other monarch watchers were seeing similar behavior. These monarchs were migrating, and some were laying eggs! See Dr. Taylor’s discussion on this topic at <http://www.texasento.net/premig.htm>

Dr. Oberhauser of the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project (MLMP) at the University of Minnesota further notes that from MLMP data, observers in the central and southern US have often seen monarch adults, eggs and

larvae after not seeing them most of the summer. She explains, “It makes evolutionary sense that some monarchs would fly south as they laid their eggs, since an egg laid in August in Missouri or Virginia is probably more likely to develop and migrate to Mexico than one laid in Minnesota, where a hard freeze in early September is not that uncommon.”

Gail Morris, director of the Southwest Monarch Study (SWMS), also points out “...where I live in the greater Phoenix area we usually see them (premigrants) right around September 1<sup>st</sup> each year and they load up our milkweed with eggs as they sweep through. With our warm temperatures, they have just the right amount of time to complete their life cycle and join our main migration for the 33<sup>rd</sup> latitude from September 29 to October 11.” She says, “It’s rather fun to look for this wave, so if you’ve never done this before, check your latitude and watch for monarch and egg-laying activity.”

The premigrants will travel through your area about 30 days before the main fall migration. So using your latitude, check when the peak fall migration usually occurs in your area at <http://monarchwatch.org/tagmig/peak.html>. Then start looking 30 days before that time, and you may note the premigration! To help make the monarch premigrants journey successful, it will be necessary for them to find ample milkweed for egg laying, and loads of nectar sources to sustain them as they move south. Have you planted a butterfly habitat or created a butterfly garden for them to use? **If not, plan to participate in the Wild for Monarchs campaign hosted by a local Wild Ones chapter in your area. For more information** <http://www.wildones.org/learn/wild-for-monarchs/> If we are going to sustain the monarchs migration in the northeast US region, we need the premigrants’ offspring to contribute to the overwintering population in Mexico this winter.