NAMI Connection

An e-Newsletter of the North American Monarch Institute

2011 NAMI Update

Watching a monarch pupate.
Photo by Lis Young-Isebrand

The second North American Monarch Institute (NAMI) was held on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. With support from the US Forest Service International Programs and Monarchs in the Classroom, forty four participants from thirty-two different schools, museums and nature centers attended the Institute for 3 days of instruction on the monarch butterfly and it's habitat.

Learning to hold a dragonfly.
Photo by Lis Young-Isebrand

All participants engaged in over 25 hours of hands-on training of monarch biology, ecology and conservation. Participants worked in small groups with the teams of instructors on how to handle, care for and rear monarchs in classrooms and other workplace settings. These practical skills were enhanced with in-depth talks from monarch scientists from the United States and Mexico. This balance of practical skills and comprehensive knowledge provides the necessary confidence so that participants can teach what they have learned back at their workplace.

Monarchs depend upon their environment for survival. To promote monarch habitat enhancement, participants learned about the plants and animals with which monarchs interact with in the wild. Experienced gardeners demonstrated how schoolyard and work place habitats can be created and used to support monarch conservation and as a resource to do many different types of science inquiry investigations.

Garden Grants are Due December 9th!

Transform your schoolyard into a perfect site for student discovery! Remember to submit you application online at http://www.monarchlab.org/see/gardengrants/Default.aspx on or before December 9th. First time garden grant applicants are eligible for funding up to $1000.

2011 Garden Highlight

Jeanne Leckert of the Gesher Day School in Fairfax, Virginia embarked on a schoolyard gardening adventure of meadow proportions last spring! The Gesher day school is located in a 57 acre area that included an abandoned field. Although the field included some natives, it was mostly overgrown with non-natives and had low plant diversity. After participating in the 2010 NAMI course Jeanne solicited the support of her principal, building engineer, a community member and colleagues to create a team dedicated to transforming the abandoned field into a diverse meadow ripe for student discovery with funds from the NAMI garden grant program.

The team decided to plant native plants because they will attract and provide habitat to the native animals in the area (including monarchs!) as well as require less care. Her application includes a diverse list of native plants to the Virginia area to be planted at a rate of about 2 - 3 dozen per year. The team must pace the planting because there isn't an easy access to water in the meadow. So, until the new plants are established they require regular watering that must be carried to the site .

Since the meadow has been planted Jeanne reported "Students always love going outside. Working in the meadow has given us teachers a great “excuse” to take them there. Teachers are finding new ways all the time to incorporate the meadow into their ongoing curriculum. Fifth graders go there to do a “nature survey” in the way of Lewis and Clark. Third graders look for plants used by Native Americans. Second graders stuffed a pillow with fluffy seeds from the dogbane plant, like colonists did. First graders collected and examined insects. Middle Schoolers helped younger students plant new native plants. Many grades went there for prayer services. The entire school created border stones and placed them along the path as part of a school-wide celebration."

Congratulations to Jeanne and the Gesher Day School for enhancing their green space for students and wild organisms!

Migration Update

Preparing for Migration
Monarchs nectaring on flowers in Northern Minnesota.

By the middle of September last year, Journey North had 156 reports of fall roosts, whereas this year at that time there were only 43. They also report that the roosts this year have been smaller than those of last year. Last year the largest roost reported was around 10,000 monarchs and this year the largest roost so far was reported at about 1500 monarchs. To follow migration on Journey North, visit the interactive maps of monarch fall roosts and monarch sightings.

Due to the severe drought in Texas this summer, scientists are worried that the nectar source that the state usually provides for monarchs may run short this year. Monarchs need this nectar source in order to energize for the migration and store fat in order to survive the winter in Mexico.

Help monarchs energize for their journey to Mexico by preparing a butterfly buffet.

Concept of the Month: Senescence

Nearing the end of the normal life span. This term is often used to describe plants (see the photo of senescing milkweed (bottom right), but also lakes or other bodies of water in advanced stages of eutrophication. For example, a lake that is filling with accumulated aquatic vegetation, dead plant material, and sediments can be described as senescent because it is nearing extinction as a productive lake environment.

Senescing milkweed Photo by Liz Goehring