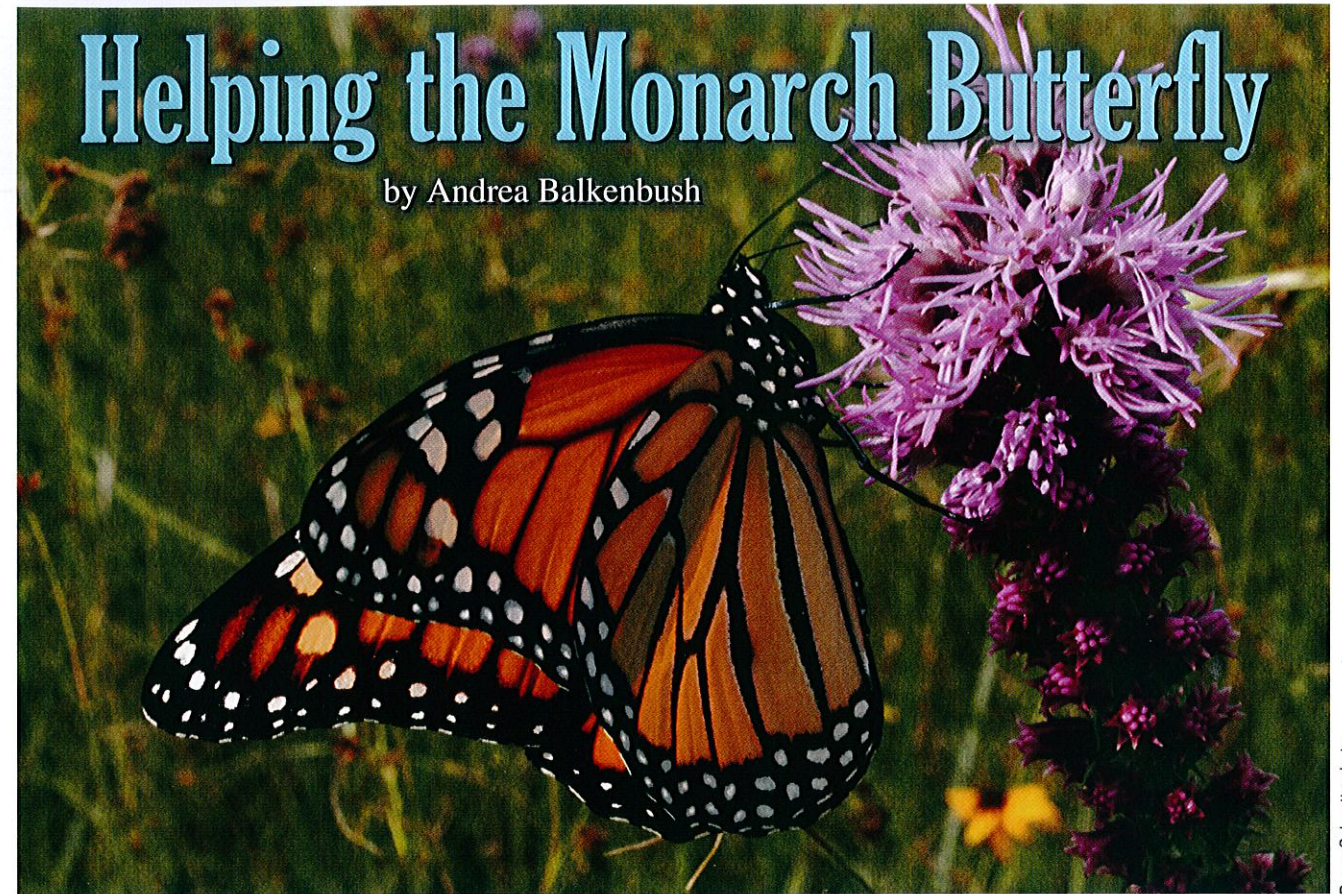


Helping the Monarch Butterfly

by Andrea Balkenbush



Bruce Schuette photo

The monarch is one of the most familiar butterflies in North America. The orange-and-black species is known for its annual, multi-generational migration from Mexico to as far north as Canada. Monarch populations have decreased considerably over the past 20 years due to habitat loss in the United States and Mexico. One of the serious habitat losses is the dwindling availability of native milkweed in the Midwest.

Missouri is a particularly important state for monarchs because it lies within the spring and fall migratory path and is a major breeding area during the spring. Without adequate milkweed habitat, the cycle and population is at risk.

The Department of Natural Resources has a long history of protecting and restoring Missouri's natural landscapes in our state parks, however, there are many more opportunities to contribute. Partnering with entities to restore severely degraded former mine-waste sites back to native prairie in Webb City, Mo. is one example.

The department also is incorporating a monarch and pollinator seed mix in some coal mine reclamation projects. These restored areas will feature native prairie plants including several species of milkweed and many other wildflowers. These additions will improve habitat for monarch reproduction and feeding.

To help more people appreciate the issues surrounding the monarch and how they can help, the department's Youth Education and Interpretation program has developed webpages about the monarch butterfly migration, annual cycle, life cycle and habitat needs. The website also provides detailed information about how anyone can take action and start a monarch butterfly garden. Go to dnr.mo.gov/education/monarchs/ for more information.

With combined efforts from all Missourians, our region can provide enhanced habitat for monarchs and all pollinators. Creating monarch habitat also supports the needs of other pollinators. Did you know that every third bite of food we eat is reliant upon pollination?

Together, we can once again fill the skies with monarch butterflies, support pollinators, and ourselves.

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See Partnering for Missouri's Prairies in the Winter 2017 issue of *Missouri Resources* for more details about the Webb City prairie restoration project.

(Top) A monarch butterfly feeds atop a prairie blazing star, one of several native wildflowers that support the threatened insect.