

**MONARCHS at NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

Plan now for Monarch madness in Fall 2008. Monarchs, the brilliant orange and black butterflies, travel thousands of miles every fall from where they first emerged from cocoons to a handful of overwintering sites in Central Mexico. Several national wildlife refuges sit on the Monarch's migration trail.

**St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Florida**

On Florida's coast south of Tallahassee, St. Marks is the last stop for Monarchs before they fly out over the Gulf of Mexico. Flying from as far north as Canada the tired butterflies drop down to feed on October blooming salt bushes, waiting for the wind to shift and carry them toward Mexico. Annually on the fourth Saturday of October, St. Marks Refuge holds a Butterfly Festival with guided walks, tagging demonstrations, and a tent filled with live butterflies. <http://www.fws.gov/saintmarks/>

**Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge**

At the tip of the Delmarva Peninsula between the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay, this 1,157-acre refuge is an important stopover for migratory birds and butterflies. In 1999, there were 100,000 Monarchs in one night. Each year a count records how "fat" the Monarch is, the condition of its wings and its gender, then the butterfly is tagged. The tagging operation, from mid-September to late October, is open to the public, as is the annual Birding Festival when butterfly walks are offered. <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/easternshore/>

**Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, Texas**

Balcones Canyonlands, where the Great Plains and the Gulf coast meet, is made up of limestone hills and spring-fed canyons, habitat for plants and animals that live nowhere else. In late September/early October thousands of Monarchs a day flutter through the prairies and oak savannahs here. There are butterfly walks and talks in the fall as well as during the Songbird Festival in the spring. <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/balcones/index.htm>

**Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Kansas**

Here in the central Kansas wetlands, Monarchs tend to appear through mid-September. Toward evening, the best areas for viewing Monarchs are sheltered places that are cool and damp, while during the day, it's the wildflower areas. During Monarch Mania, the third Saturday in September, everybody gets a chance to tag monarchs. Some years the butterflies are too high to be caught for tagging. Other years, it's possible to catch multiple Monarchs with one wave of the net. <http://www.fws.gov/quivira>

**Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Iowa**

Near Prairie City, Iowa, the refuge is in the midst of one of the nation's largest tallgrass prairie restoration projects. More than 3,000 acres have been planted with native plants, many of which are attractive to Monarchs like sawtooth sunflowers. Monarchs can be seen along the Tallgrass Trail, the sides of refuge roads, and just by sitting still. Often Monarchs will shelter for the night in the tall bluestem grasses, emerging as the day warms. Tagging is held annually on Monarch Madness Day, the second Tuesday of September. <http://www.tallgrass.org>

Managing the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conserves, protects and enhances fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the benefit of the American people.



Ann Hattes has been published in English, Japanese, Arabic, German, and Chinese. Visit this award-winning writer at: <http://www.home.ix.netcom.com/~hattesn>