



# Southwest Florida Monarch Monitoring Program



## Goals and Instructions

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**Background and Brief Description of Program:** Monarchs in southern Florida are unique in that they actively occur as adults throughout the year unlike most other States. Monarch migration patterns have been fairly well documented; however, because of the geographic location of Florida, it has historically been difficult to determine what role suitable habitats in Florida play during both the fall and spring migrations. To begin to address these questions, a tagging program is being initiated in southwest Florida. Easy to observe, numbered tags with contact information (see picture on page 3) will be used along with data forms to capture pertinent field/life history information. The project coordinator will maintain a database containing tagging and recapture information, and a map with locations of those actively tagging will be kept by Nick Bodven (permission by tagger required). Nets, tags, and data forms will be freely distributed by the project coordinator to those interested in becoming involved with the program. It is our goal to eventually expand the program to other parts of Florida and to share data on the internet with anyone (e.g., individuals, organizations, schools) who may be interested. Observing a tagged monarch is a rare event, and it may take time to see the research benefits of this program; however, by conducting these tagging efforts we hope to raise awareness about monarchs, butterflies, and nature in general.

### Goals:

- A. Track the residential longevity and survival rates of adult monarchs in southwest Florida by maintaining locality data points for those tagged adults recaptured or observed.
- B. Determine if monarchs tagged in southwest Florida migrate to Mexico or islands in the Caribbean during the fall migration.
- C. Determine if monarchs that have overwintered in southwest Florida appear in northern parts of the State (or further north) during the spring remigration.
- D. Better determine which available milkweed species at a given time of year, native or non-native, influence monarch migration behaviors in southwest Florida.
- E. Provide a better understanding of which habitats, hostplants, and nectar sources should be conserved for monarchs residing in or migrating through Florida.

- F. Assess a variety of tag colors, shapes, text, and reflectivity to increase the chances of recapture or observation through camera or binocular lenses (where netting will not be required).

**Tagging Directions:** Because adult monarchs occur throughout the year in southwestern Florida, tagging should take place during all months. When searching for and tagging monarchs, it is important to **be careful** where you step. Florida is home to numerous snake and reptile species; thus, tagging in groups where people can observe the person netting the monarchs is highly recommended. Netting adult butterflies is not easy, so be patient when tagging—some days go better than others! It is better to be safe and enjoy watching them from a distance if they cannot be easily netted and tagged.

1. Adults are best netted during early morning hours (or cooler parts of the day) and when they are nectaring. Be mindful of the plants they are on when using the net to capture them and remember to fold the bag portion of the net in way that does not harm the butterfly.
2. Data Forms distributed with tags should be used to track field observations. Fill in the blanks when a monarch is tagged or when a tagged monarch is recaptured. (Male monarchs bear a small black dot on the upper surface of the center of the hindwings.) When the 20 rows on the Data Form are complete and/or 20 tags are used, additional tags can be requested. Please contact the project coordinator. At this time she will also provide instructions on how to submit the completed Data Forms.
3. Tags should be placed on the bottom side in the center of the hindwing as shown in the picture below. Be careful when handling monarchs so as to not rub off too many wing scales. Using the thumb on the tag and index finger on the topside of the hindwing, press the two fingers together for a few seconds to make sure the tag adheres to the wing. Be sure to include the tag number on the Data Form.

#### Tagging in monarch 'hot spots'

If you are tagging for longer periods of time in one area, especially in monarch 'hot spots', it is recommended you bring a cooler and butterfly envelopes to use. When an adult is netted, carefully tag the individual and then place the butterfly in the envelope and into the cooler containing ice packs. Do not place butterflies directly on ice, but rather in a container wrapped in a towel to keep them from directly resting on the ice. This will ensure that these particular tagged individuals do not disturb other monarchs after being handled or are not captured again on that given day. When the tagging period is over, carefully remove individuals from the envelope and place on a substrate that is located in the sun during cooler months or shade during warmer months.

Experiencing problems with tags

If you are experiencing problems seeing the tags or with tags adhering or falling off the wings, or have questions about the tags in general, please contact as soon as possible Nick Bodven at:

-S W FLORIDA BUTTERFLY BLOG: <http://nickiebody.blogspot.com/>  
-[shandys@embarqmail.com](mailto:shandys@embarqmail.com)



4. HAVE FUN and make your own observations on butterfly behavior and all of the other interesting natural interactions occurring in the area.

Notes and suggestions for improving SWFMMP (Provide feedback to Project Coordinator):

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