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Utah Bug Club



Danaus plexippus
(monarch butterfly)

Family: Danaidae

Discussion: Monarchs are classic migrators that arrive in Northern Utah roughly from May to July. The progeny of these butterflies generally emerge in late summer to early fall and then migrate back either to Mexico or to Northern California to spend the winter.

In Utah, Salt Lake, Davis, and Weber Counties, monarch habitat includes mountain canyons as well as valley floor wet meadows in association with Russian olive trees, reeds, teasel, bull thistles, knapweed, etc. Manmade canals that flood these agricultural areas create suitable habitat for Monarchs; which like to roost in Russian Olive trees during the heat of the day. Females often will lay many of the ova on milkweed growing nearby these Russian Olive trees.

Suitable Lab Host: Monarchs feed on a few species of milkweed; the most common being *Asclepias speciosa* in our valley floors.

Effective strategy to obtain immatures: Obtain ova from live female(s) or check the underside of leaves of healthy milkweed plants growing adjacent to Russian Olive trees in wet meadows or along manmade canals during the months of August and September.

Method of oviposition: Place live female in at least a 12" by 12" by 12" a cage with milkweed cuttings placed in a water bottle; for female to lay eggs. Feed female honey-water regularly.

Method of rearing: Separate ova from other ova into individual solo cups. When ova hatch, place young larva onto milkweed cuttings. Replace milkweed cuttings with fresh cuttings roughly every four days. Instead of attempting to move larva directly, cut around larva on plant with scissors and place on fresh plant. Keep bottled plant away from direct sunlight. Monarch caterpillars will go through a series of five molts before hanging and forming a chrysalis.

Monarch pupae take roughly 10 days to emerge as an adult butterfly.



Figure 1: Wet meadow habitat (associated with agricultural areas) where one can find milkweed growing amongst the Russian Olive trees, along canals, or out in open fields.



Figure 2: Monarch female laying eggs on larval host *Asclepias speciosa* (milkweed).



Figure 3: Once you have monarch eggs (ova), cut out each ovum from leaf.



Figure 4. Place each ovum into individual small solo cups; so that young hatchlings will not find and cannibalize other ova after hatching.



Figure 5: Caterpillar will hatch from its egg roughly five days after it was laid. Carefully place caterpillar on milkweed cuttings in bottle with water. Place bottled cuttings in a 5 gallon bucket with a lid that has airflow.



Figure 6: Young larva initiating feeding on milkweed cuttings.



Figure 7: Large larva feeding on milkweed cuttings. The approximate time between Figure 6 and Figure 7 is three weeks.



Figure 8: When the larva finishes feeding, it will hang in this fashion before forming a chrysalis.



Figure 9: The larva will then shed its skin forming a chrysalis. The adult monarch should emerge in about 10 days at normal room temperature.