

## Monarchs In Mexico by Cindy Eusey

The Monarch butterflies that were born in Crawford County last August and September are completing their long life cycle. The autumn born butterflies live eight to nine months, unlike their counterparts born in May, June and July that live only about a month.

Their journey began in the fall with the instinct to migrate rather than mate and lay eggs. They ride the upper air currents and navigate using the earth's magnetic fields and ultraviolet light from the sun. They know that they are to head south and west to the Oyamel fir forest in the trans-volcanic mountains of central Mexico. This is the only place in the world where the Oyamel fir trees grow. It is a unique micro climate at an elevation of about 10,000 feet. It is here that 60-120 million Monarchs rest and over winter after their long journey from Canada and the United States. The climate is cool and under the canopy of the fir trees the temperature is just right for the butterflies to over winter in a state of semi-hibernation. The trees also provide protection from sudden winter storms although freezing rain can kill the Monarchs.

About the middle of March the temperatures warm and the Monarchs know spring is in the air. Their hormones kick in and they feel the urge to mate. After mating in Mexico, the males die. The females then begin a shorter journey north to Texas and Louisiana where the milkweed is beginning to grow. Milkweed is the only plant on which Monarchs will lay their eggs. After laying eggs, the extended life of the female Monarchs ends. The spring life cycles continue until the Monarchs reach our area usually in late May or June.

They have struggled to complete the journey of thousands of miles, survived the winter in Mexico, and journeyed north to deposit their eggs so that a new generation can continue. The story of survival of the Monarch butterfly is truly amazing, mysterious and magical. Without milkweed host plants on which the females lay her eggs, nectar plants for food and the Oyamel fir trees high in the Mexico mountains for protection, this tiny creature would not be around to beautify our landscape. It takes Canada, the United States and Mexico working together to keep the cycle going. Please do your part and add some Butterfly weed, milkweed and nectar producing plants to your garden this spring and summer. The Monarchs need our help and in return they will make your world a more beautiful place.