

Monarchs moves closer to extinction

By Olga R. Rodriguez
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The number of western monarch butterflies wintering along the California coast has plummeted precipitously to a record low, putting the orange-and-black insects closer to extinction, researchers announced last week.

An annual winter count by the Xerces Society recorded fewer than 2,000 butterflies, a massive decline from the tens of thousands tallied in recent years and the millions that clustered in trees from Northern California's Marin County to San Diego County in the south in the 1980s.

Western monarch butterflies head south from the Pacific Northwest to California each winter, returning to the same places and even the same trees, where they cluster to keep warm. The monarchs generally arrive in California at the beginning of November and spread across the country once warmer weather arrives in March.

On the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, another monarch population travels from southern Canada and the northeastern United States across thousands of miles to spend the winter in central Mexico. Scientists estimate the monarch population in the eastern U.S. has fallen about 80 percent since the mid-1990s, but the drop-off in the western U.S. has been even steeper.

The Xerces Society, a nonprofit environmental organization that focuses on the conservation of invertebrates, recorded about 29,000 butterflies in its annual survey last winter. That was not much different than the tally the winter before, when an all-time low of 27,000 monarchs were counted.

But the count this year is dismal. At iconic monarch wintering sites in the city of Pacific Grove, volunteers

didn't see a single butterfly this winter. Other well-known locations, such as Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove and Natural Bridges State Park, only hosted a few hundred butterflies, researchers said.

"These sites normally host thousands of butterflies, and their absence this year was heartbreaking for volunteers and visitors flocking to these locales, hoping to catch a glimpse of the awe-inspiring clusters of monarch butterflies," said Sarina Jepsen, director of endangered species at the Xerces Society.

Scientists say the butterflies are at critically low levels in western states because of destruction to their milkweed habitat along their migratory route as housing expands into their territory and use of pesticides and herbicides increases.

Editor's note: Sisters resident Jean Nave and teacher Susie Werts have led local efforts to plant milkweed for migrating monarch butterflies.

Researchers also have noted the effect of climate change. Along with farming, climate change is one of the main drivers of the monarch's threatened extinction, disrupting an annual 3,000-mile (4,828-kilometer) migration synched to springtime and the blossoming of wildflowers. Massive wildfires throughout the U.S. West last year may have influenced their breeding and migration, researchers said.



A 2017 study by Washington State University researchers predicted that if the monarch population dropped below 30,000, the species would likely go extinct in the next few decades if nothing is done to save them.

Monarch butterflies lack state and federal legal protection to keep their habitat from being destroyed or degraded. In December, federal officials declared the monarch butterfly "a candidate" for threatened or endangered status but said no action would be taken for several years because of the many other species awaiting that designation.

The Xerces Society said it will keep pursuing protection for the monarch and work with a wide variety of partners "to implement science-based conservation actions urgently needed to help the iconic and beloved western monarch butterfly migration."

People can help the colorful insects by planting early-blooming flowers and milkweed to fuel migrating monarchs on their paths to other states, the Xerces Society said.

Sisters salutes...

AFSC (Age Friendly Sisters Country) expresses a heart-felt thank you to John Griffith and Randal Broomhead for their two-plus years of dedicated service to Sisters Country as founding board members and strategic leaders of AFSC.

We also wish to thank Sharon Thorkildson for serving as our first volunteer bookkeeper. Through their combined efforts, AFSC has become a viable nonprofit committed to launching grassroots projects that enhance the quality of life (AKA livability) in our community. This is how the STARS (free medical transportation service), and Sisters Villages (neighborhood based social/service) Action Teams got their starts. With a well-laid organizational

foundation in place, Ren and John are stepping back from board responsibilities. We are so grateful for their contributions.

AFSC is happy to welcome Peggy Tehan as our new board treasurer, taking over the well-organized books that Sharon helped John set up. With room at the table, AFSC welcomes anyone with enthusiasm and a desire to contribute to explore opportunities by contacting AFSC at www.agefriendlysisters.com.



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Things to participate in online while staying safely at home.

MAR 3 WED **Deschutes Public Library: How to Really Help Injured and Orphaned Wildlife** 6:30 p.m. The Sunriver Nature Center & Observatory shares common encounters & experiences. Go to www.deschuteslibrary.org/calendar/.

MAR 4 THUR **Paulina Springs Books Virtual Event** 6:30 p.m. Abby Schneiderman, Adam Seifer & Gene Newman share how to get organized from their new book, "In Case You Get Hit by a Bus." For info call 541-549-0866 or go to www.paulinaspringsbooks.com.

MAR 5 FRI **Deschutes Public Library: Central Oregon Bioregional Herbalism** 2 p.m. Learn about local plants' medicinal properties and ethical harvesting. Go to www.deschuteslibrary.org/calendar/.

MAR 9 TUES **Deschutes Public Library: Wolves in the West** 6 p.m. Wolf biologist Dick Theil details the eradication and return of the wolf in the West. Go to www.deschuteslibrary.org/calendar/.

MAR 11 THUR **Deschutes Public Library: Wildflowers of Oregon** 6 p.m. Discover resources to aid in wildflower identification with Damian Fagan, former National Park Service ranger and filed biologist. Go to www.deschuteslibrary.org/calendar/.

MAR 16 TUES **Deschutes Public Library: Pollinator Pathway and Native Bees of Central Oregon** 3 p.m. Hear from local environmentalists about the Bend Pollinator Pathway launching this spring and how you can help pollinators. Go to www.deschuteslibrary.org/calendar/.