



Nature Nuggets: Marvelous Monarchs

Audience: 4-7 year olds and parents/guardians. Each station can accommodate 10-15 kids at a time. Younger and older siblings are welcome but content is geared towards 4-7 year olds.

Theme: Monarch butterflies are special creatures that visit Fort Collins each summer.

Materials:

- Blankets for sitting
- Books
- Stuffed animals
- Butterfly nets
- Butterfly case
- Swallowtail life cycle stages
- Pictures of monarch life stages
- Pictures of milkweed
- Cones
- Milkweed food cards
- Blankets for chrysalis
- Butterfly wings
- Party blowers
- 2-4" peat pots
- Milkweed seeds
- Soil
- Water

1: STORY CRITTER CORNER

1 MNA

This is a free-flow activity so kids can come and go as they please. It will be a self-lead station on blankets with books and stuffed animals for parents to engage with their children.

Books:

- Monarch Butterfly
- Marigold's Wings

2: NATURE WALK

1 MN, 1 MNA

Introduction: Let's go on a butterfly hunt! Walk along the path into Ross stopping to look for milkweed plants and butterflies. (The program is focused on Monarchs, but take time to look at any butterflies, painted ladies look very similar).

Theme: Monarch butterflies are a special friend that visit Fort Collins each summer.

Stewardship message: Monarch butterfly caterpillars eat only milkweed so it is important to plant milkweed so these butterflies continue to visit.

Optional talking points:

- Pollination – the key role butterflies and other insects play in pollination
- Life cycles - butterflies need leaves for the caterpillars to eat and flowers/nectar for the adult butterfly to eat
- Migration – butterflies travel far distances (Canada to Mexico). It is a mystery how they know where to go as each trip is a new generation of butterflies so they only make the trip once and never have a chance to learn from their parents (previous generation).

Conclusion: Thank everyone for coming to the program and remind them of the other stations available. Encourage kids and parents to come to other events and activities and remind the parents of up-coming programs with the Natural Areas.

3: ACTIVITY

1 MN, 1 MNA

Introduction

Introduce yourself and thank the kids and parents for being there.

Ask the children:

- *Have they seen a caterpillar before? (show picture)*
- *Have they seen a butterfly before? (show picture)*
- *Did they know that these are the same animal?*

Explain that today they are learning all about Monarch butterflies and their life cycles. When an animal changes from one form to another, it is called metamorphosis. Have them all practice saying this word.

If some have already visited other stations, you may start by asking what they have learned or seen so far?

Body

Story

- Using the monarch puppet, tell a brief story about a butterfly's life. Give the story life and be animated! Have fun with this.
- Example: There once was a caterpillar named Molly who dreamed of the day she would turn into a beautiful Monarch Butterfly! You see Molly was a caterpillar and she spent her days searching for milkweed to eat. No matter how much she ate, she always seemed to be hungry. She would grow so big, that she would break through her skin and molt, but still she kept eating. One day, she broke through her skin and it peeled back to form a sack and she found herself in a tight bundle hanging from a leaf. This bundle is called a chrysalis or cocoon. When the time was right, she began to wiggle herself free. When she broke free of the chrysalis, she could feel her new set of wings, but they were damp and she could not move them. She was so excited to try her new wings, but needed to be patient.

She found a place to dry out in the sun, and soon she was able to fly off into the cool air. Now she had a new mouth like a straw, so she no longer needed to eat milkweed leaves, instead she found her favorite food to be sweet nectar from flowers. She danced around the field fluttering her wings and admiring their beauty – she couldn't believe her day had finally come!

- After the story is over, review the names of the different life stages with the kids using the rubber models of the swallowtail life stages.
 - Egg
 - Caterpillar/Larva – molt several times
 - Pupa/Chrysalis/Cocoon
 - Adult butterfly – has wings and proboscis

Life Cycles Obstacle Course

- Kids will move through different stations. They can do this all at once or in groups of 5-10 if you have a large group.
- Station 1 – Egg – Curl up in a small ball on a blanket (the leaf).
- Station 2 – Caterpillar – Crawl around and eat, eat, eat. Kids will crawl around and collect food (milkweed cards). Make sure kids stay within a cone-marked area on the grass.
- Station 3 – Chrysalis – Curl up in a blanket like a burrito.
- Station 4 – Butterfly – Put on wings and party blower (proboscis) and go around to different flowers to drink nectar. (These can be real flowers if in bloom, or fake flowers you put out ahead of time.)
- Kids can then lay eggs and go through the obstacle course again!

Conclusion

As we learned, Monarchs are amazing creatures that go through different life stages.

Ask the kids:

- *What was your favorite life stage during the obstacle course?*
- *What do monarch caterpillars eat? What about adult butterflies?*
- *Why are butterflies important for other plants? – Pollination!*

Next time you see a butterfly or a caterpillar, think about what it needs to eat and where it might find its food.

Thank everyone for coming to the program and remind them of the other stations available. Encourage kids and parents to come to other events and activities and remind the parents of upcoming programs with the Natural Areas.

4: STEWARDSHIP CRAFT – Planting Milkweed

2 MNAs

This is a free-flow activity so kids can come and go as they please.

Monarch butterflies need milkweed to survive! Let's plant some monarch food.

Steps:

1. Welcome kids and ask if they would like to plant some flowers.
2. Show them a picture of milkweed so they see what they are planting.
3. Remind them that this is the primary food of monarch caterpillars.
4. Show them how they will fill a pot $\frac{3}{4}$ full with soil, add water, and 1-2 seeds and then top with $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of soil
5. Show them how to water the plant from the bottom using a tray.
6. Remind them that plants need water and sunlight to grow so they should take good care of their plant.
7. Their plant should sprout within 10-15 days.
8. Once the plant reaches 3 inches tall, it is ready to be transplanted outside.
9. Once their milkweed is in the ground, it will only need to be watered for the first few days and then it should be good on its own.
10. Once they are finished, thank them for coming and over to keep their planted pot safe with their name on it while they go to other stations.

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