



AP FILE PHOTO

A queen butterfly (left) comes in for a landing as it joins a Palamedes swallowtail on a tithonia flower. The weather this year is prime for butterflies. On a sunny days, butterflies are everywhere.

All aflutter

JOLIET HERALD

By Dawn Aulet

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This is a good year for butterflies. "Some years have really been outstanding," said Eric Ulaszek, horticulturist for Midewin Tallgrass Prairie. "Right now, it's hard to miss butterflies if you are in the right area."

Ulaszek said it has been a moderate, moist summer, but since it is warm and dry right now, butterflies are plentiful. They like to be out when the sun is shining.

"Go on a sunny day, that's when the butterflies are going to be out having fun," Ulaszek said.

Midewin is a 19,000-acre facility that is in various stages of restoration. Not all areas are open to the public, but many of the prairie restoration sites are. And, although none of the prairies are specifically designed to attract butterflies, many of them do.

In fact, Midewin is a participating site in the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network, an organization that monitors the health of Illinois butterfly populations.

Monarch project

Midewin also is participating in an outreach program that uses the monarch butterfly to inspire urban youth, especially Latinos, to be stewards of nature.

"Chicago is a natural fit because it is on the flyway," said Mike Rizo, Midewin archeologist.

Chicago also has the second largest population of Mexicans in the United States, with the majority being from the state of Michoacán, which is where monarch butterflies winter.

Each year, monarch butterflies migrate from the United States and Canada to Mexico.

Rizo said monarchs are a good choice for inspiration because they are an easily recognizable symbol.

"What were doing is (encouraging) kids to take action in their own backyards and school yards," Rizo said.

Butterflies at Pilcher Park

Six years ago, that was the intent of Pilcher Park Nature Center as well.

A grant allowed the park to use a section to restore into a prairie, which the park staff planted with a variety of butterfly-friendly plants.

These days, swallowtails are seen fairly often, as well as hummingbird moths.

"You'll see one kind of butterfly or insect for awhile and then you will maybe see another," said Mary Brauer, Pilcher Park's naturalist.

The prairie needs a bit of care to maintain. "Invasive species will sometimes pop up," Brauer said.

Last year, to keep the invasive species under control and maintain the health of the prairie, the park staff burned it. "The wonderful thing about that is when you burn an area, you get rid of the invasive plants more than the native plants," she said.



Did you know?

1. Butterflies can see red, green, and yellow.
2. The top butterfly flight speed is 12 miles per hour. Some moths can fly 25 miles per hour.
3. The females of some moth species lack wings; all they can do to move is crawl.
4. Butterflies cannot fly if their body temperature is less than 86 degrees.
5. There are about 24,000 species of butterflies. The moths are even more numerous — about 140,000 species of them were counted all over the world.

Source: www.thebutterfly-site.com

Hot spots for butterfly activity

By Dawn Aulet

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We humans know fall is on its way when we see the school supplies lining the shelves at the store.

We know when we see the last of the summer festivals come and go. We know when we feel the chill in the air, and animals know it, too.

Birds begin migrations, land animals start to gather food to hoard for winter. And, here in Illinois, the monarch butterflies that are born to migrate begin to do so in a few short weeks.

Monarch butterflies live only for about four to five weeks. But every year there is a generation of the mon-

archs that are born in late summer whose job it is to migrate to Mexico. These migratory butterflies survive seven or eight months, according to the World Wildlife Federation Web site, www.worldwildlife.org. That makes right now the perfect time to see one of the many butterflies that call Illinois home.

And, not all Illinois butterflies migrate to warmer weather. Some, like the mourning cloak, live through the Illinois winters, making them (black with blue dots and cream trim on their wings) some of the first that are seen in the spring.

Here in Will County, we are lucky to have a variety of areas in which to spot butterflies.

■ Pilcher Park Nature Center, 1501 Highland Park Drive in Joliet. Open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily through the end of August, then 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. For more information, call (815) 741-7277.

■ Barber and Oberwortmann Horticultural Center and Bird Haven Greenhouse, 227 N. Gougar Road in Joliet. It's open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. For more information, call (815) 741-7278

■ Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, 30239 S. Illinois 53, Wilmington. Stop in the visitor's center and ask about the best places to see butterflies. They often congregate in one area. For more information, call (815) 423-6370.

Following the great monarch migration

A monarch butterfly stops for nectar on its migration back to Mexico for the winter. You can track the migration online.

AP FILE PHOTO



Starting in October students and teachers can track the migration of the monarch butterfly throughout the 2008-09 school year.

By visiting Monarch Live at <http://monarch.pwnet.org>, you can register to watch the monarch travel to Mexico.

Midwin will be involved in the Monarch Live program by providing technical support and native prairie

plants to partners. Midwin also will be involved in planning the events scheduled for Chicago in May 2009.

Teachers and students around the world will participate in live Web casts, satellite broadcasts, and/or teleconferencing.

The Monarch Live curriculum is designed for grades 4 through 8, but there will be topics of interest to all age levels.