

'My heart always flutters': Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue joins fight to preserve monarch butterflies

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CBC



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Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue is the latest municipality to join the Mission Monarch program, which unites more than 150 municipalities around North America to help the preserve migrating butterfly.

In the last 20 years, the monarch butterfly population has plummeted by 90 per cent, often due to pesticides, loss of habitat and pollution.

The City of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue has followed the lead of boroughs like Saint-Laurent and Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie, which have already undertaken the so-called Mayors' Monarch Pledge in partnership with the David Suzuki Foundation.

The plan is to "make our municipality more friendly for monarch butterflies," according to city councillor Ryan Young.

They celebrated the weekend announcement during the Naturally, Sainte-Anne event by releasing a kaleidoscope of butterflies into the air.

"It's always special," said Young. "My heart always flutters or soars [with] each one that we release."

The city was also distributing free milkweed seeds, inviting residents to plant the weed preferred by caterpillars in their gardens.

Milkweed is the plant of choice for Monarch butterflies when it comes to laying their eggs and serves as an important food source for their larvae.

Several Montreal boroughs have implemented the planting of milkweed in public parks in order to help bolster the

monarch population.

Tracking migration

The Insectarium at Space for Life in Montreal is also working to preserve the monarchs.

It's part of a Canada-wide research project working to map the presence of Monarch butterflies and the known locations of milkweed.

Monarchs raised at the Insectarium are tagged with numbers and input into an international system, so that scientists can study their migration patterns as they head down to Mexico during the winter.

People across Canada are invited to submit their observations to the database at mission-monarch.org

Painted ladies abound

Maxim Larrivée of the Morgan Arboretum in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue told CBC many people who think they're spotting monarchs are actually looking at painted lady butterflies, distinguished by their more subdued colours and have more of a stonework pattern.

Both types of butterflies migrate south for the winter, but painted ladies don't go all the way to Mexico, often staying in parts of the southern United States.

Larrivée says 2012 was a historic year in terms of migration and estimated that this year is comparable in terms of the sheer numbers of butterflies people are seeing across the city.

"It's fantastic, who doesn't like to be surrounded by butterflies," said Larrivée.

And while he wants to see the population of both painted ladies and monarchs continue to rebound, Larrivée said releasing groups of monarchs into the wild can be a hindrance.

"It reduces the gene pool, the genetic diversity ... it shows they carry more pathogens," he said. "The potential adverse effects it can have on the native population and the migratory population can outweigh the benefits."

For anyone looking to help out, Larrivée suggests people plant milkweed and take steps to make their home gardens a butterfly-friendly place.