

## The King of Rouge Park

In summer of 2006, we enjoyed the widespread abundance of a striking large orange and black butterfly, the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), in Rouge Park and throughout southwestern Ontario. Early settlers called them "King Billys" after William of Orange, a 17<sup>th</sup> century King of England. Noted Canadian butterfly researcher Phil Schappert calls the Monarch the King of North America. When you know a little more about this magnificent insect, you might just agree!

Aside from being one of our largest and most abundant butterflies, the Monarch is an international traveler, and the symbol of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Breeding on milkweeds in meadows as far north as southern Ontario, the adults migrate through the United States to central Mexican highland Oyamel Fir forests where they spend the winter. The overwintering butterflies begin their return journey in February and March, with the pregnant females seeking milkweed plants to lay their eggs, first in Texas, and later generations reaching as far north as southern Canada.

This is a perilous journey, and for this complex life cycle to remain successful, the Mexican fir forests must be protected from clearing or fires, sufficient interim habitat in Texas must be maintained and summer breeding and rearing habitat in Ontario must be protected and expanded. If any one of these elements were to fail, the results would be disastrous. International cooperation and vigorous habitat management in each of the NAFTA countries is essential.

Milkweeds, their essential food source, were once considered to be noxious weeds and harmful

to livestock and crop production. This is now known to be false, and the presence of milkweeds along roadsides and in meadows is essential to the survival of this species.

In addition to milkweed for larval Monarchs, the adult Monarchs need water and nectar from wild and cultivated flowers to grow and build up energy reserves for their autumn journey south. Favourites include Goldenrods, Purple Coneflowers, Black-eyed Susans, Cosmos, Zinnias, Phlox, Daylilies, Asters and Butterfly Bushes. Many tips and reading materials about attracting and protecting butterflies may be found at [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org). Journey North is a science education programme used in 5000 schools throughout Canada and USA using the Internet to track the migration of Monarchs and other creatures through the seasons, see [www.learner.org/jnorth](http://www.learner.org/jnorth).

It was 30 years ago that Scarborough researchers Fred and Norah Urquhart, and an army of taggers, including Don Davis, finally solved the mystery of where the Monarchs went in autumn. The Urquharts were awarded the Order of Canada for this important scientific sleuthing, and the late Dr. Fred Urquhart was recognized for his work in the vicinity of Rouge Park in our Celebration Forest this summer.

In the spring of 2006, Rouge Park staff met with Mexico State's Secretary of Environment and

Natural Resources, Dr. Mireille Roccatti, to discuss ways in which Rouge Park can co-operate with our international partners to benefit the Monarchs throughout their life cycle. In our restoration plans, we plan to emphasize suitable meadow plantings for reproduction and rearing of these and other butterflies, and develop the right mix of habitats to ensure the long-term wellbeing of Monarchs in their summer home.

We also encourage our readers to try some attractive butterfly gardens in their yards. The beauty of the flowers and butterflies will help to ensure a long rule for our butterfly king.

*Lewis Yeager, General Manager*



M. Holmes, 2006