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## Huron Fringe Field Naturalists learn about Monarch butterflies at June meeting

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The Huron Fringe Field Naturalists concluded their 2017 winter/spring speaker series Tuesday (June 27) with an engaging presentation on Monarch butterflies, featuring the beautiful photography of Kerry Jarvis of Southampton.

Jarvis is a photographer, naturalist, author, presenter and avid gardener with a particular passion for Monarchs.

He began his presentation by highlighting the difficult plight of this easily-recognized butterfly, through habitat loss due to deforestation and lack of milkweed plants resulting from agricultural and residential chemical use. Severe and unseasonal weather changes can also impact migration success. The serious decline of the Monarch butterfly caused it to be named a Species of Special Concern in Canada in 2015.

On the plus side, milkweed, the only plant on which a Monarch lays its eggs, was de-listed from the Ontario Noxious Weed Act in 2014. Jarvis followed this good news with an interesting history of milkweed as an herbal remedy in the 1800s and an ingenious substitute for silk in wartime in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The butterfly's complete lifecycle, including mating, reproduction and metamorphosis from egg, caterpillar (larva), pupa (chrysalis) to butterfly, was clearly explained and superbly photographically-illustrated.

Members were shocked by the exceedingly-poor survival rate of the larval stage (less than one per cent) and were entranced by the example of caterpillars reared in a tub which Jarvis passed around. While most people know that several generations of Monarchs will live and die during the course of a summer, it was surprising to learn that the generation that migrates south can live for up to nine

months.

Before describing the migratory experience, Jarvis introduced butterfly-tagging in which a small circle is affixed to a hind wing bearing a unique code, a website and E-mail address, allowing researchers to track the butterflies. In 2015, a Monarch tagged in Southampton was found in Mexico. Tagging takes place in the Southampton area in late summer or early fall as the final generation of adults prepares to journey south to the wintering grounds.

The majority of Monarch butterflies over-winter in forested mountainous areas of Mexico on Oyamel Fir trees. A travel highlight for Jarvis was a trip to Michoacan, Mexico, to explore winter roosting sites. His photo of the mountainous area clearly showed the devastating extent of deforestation with only a handful of small forest patches remaining.

Alarmed by the decline in Monarch populations, in 2014 Jarvis, Melitta Smole and Stew Nutt formed the community group, Butterfly Gardens of Saugeen Shores. The group's goal is to support butterflies and pollinators by changing public attitudes toward gardening with native plants and providing butterfly habitat.

Gardens, called Pods, are spread along the Lake Huron shoreline in MacGregor Point Provincial Park, several locations in Southampton, the Saugeen Rail Trail and the Saugeen First Nation. Each garden is equipped with an identifying sign and is proudly tended by Pod Squad Ambassadors. For more information about Butterfly Gardens of Saugeen Shores and a list of ideal native plants for butterfly gardens, visit [www.butterflygardensofss.ca](http://www.butterflygardensofss.ca).

At the end of his presentation Jarvis gave away three milkweed plants and offered cecropia moth eggs to interested audience members.

The group asked questions throughout and appreciated the opportunity to learn about the life, the challenges and the opportunities to support this beautiful winged migrant.

This was the last regular field naturalists meeting until September, but members were reminded of many interesting nature and environmental activities taking place this summer, most notably the volunteer shoreline clean-up at Station Beach, Kincardine, Monday, July 10, starting at 5 p.m.



**Kerry Jarvis (left) with Pod Squad Ambassadors and Huron Fringe Field Naturalists members Bob Taylor and Anne-Marie Benedict, display the Butterfly Gardens of Saugeen Shores banner; photos by Christine Roberts**

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