

Lessons from the Monarch

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What's so special about monarch butterflies? Shouldn't we focus on endemic species? How can the Monarch help New Zealanders appreciate our distinct and fascinating biodiversity? Many children are growing up with no appreciation of the outdoors. In some parts of Auckland whole families of children have never seen bush such as Manurewa's totara glades. A phenomenon called 'nature deficit disorder' describes humans spending less time outdoors due to the increased attraction of technological devices and perceived dangers, risks and fears of leaving a man-made environment. Combine this with statistics that fewer New Zealand residents grew up here: fifty years ago children inherited an appreciation for nature from family outings. Insects in the home and workplace are feared. Rather than preventing a build-up of cockroaches, ants and flies people seek to 'exterminate' them. In the garden pesticides are seen as the quick and convenient solution to a proliferation of an insect. How does the Monarch butterfly help? It is a universal illustration of the word 'butterfly'. It may be common but in NZ it is also revered. Plant a swan plant and you have an interactive example of biodiversity in your garden. You don't just learn about the monarch. You learn about metamorphosis and ecosystems and the interdependence of insects and plants, birds, diseases and soil. You develop compassion and empathy, management and observation skills. You begin to understand that moths and wasps have their place in the cycle of nature too. And appreciate the need for biosecurity. Jacqui Knight from the Moths and Butterflies of New Zealand Trust has been on such a journey over the past fifty years. She will talk about the ten year adventure since she formed the 'Monarch Butterfly New Zealand Trust', and how the Monarch is changing the lives and attitudes of many people.

