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FEATURED

## Monarch migration: St. Mary's students study butterflies

BY MARIEL WILLIAMS | TELEGRAM STAFF Oct 30, 2018 Updated 19 hrs ago



Kate Boone, right, and Isabella Garza help Christian Demapan take a butterfly out of his net. Students at St. Mary's Catholic School spent part of Tuesday catching and tagging monarch butterflies to help study and protect the species.

Mariel Williams/Telegram

Millions of monarch butterflies are making their annual trek to Mexico right now. A few made an unscheduled stop Tuesday at St. Mary's Catholic School to get tagged and counted by science students.

Monarch butterflies migrate south every year. Volunteer-driven tagging projects help scientists determine how well the species is faring and how many butterflies survive the trip.

Nick Boor, 12, said he has never caught butterflies before.

"This is the first year our school has done it, so this is a real treat for us, because we're like the first people," Nick said.

Most monarch butterflies only live a few weeks as adults (after living as a caterpillar and then metamorphosing). But those born in the late summer migrate to Mexico and go into a semi-dormant state, allowing them to live for several months.

The goal of monarch tagging is to see where these butterflies end up, using the code on their tags to find out where they were captured and how far they have traveled. Most of the tags are recovered by scientists in Mexico. Other monarchs don't make it all the way, and people who find the tags are asked to contact the research project noted on the tag so that their identification codes and location can be recorded. Tagged monarchs have been tracked traveling from Minnesota to Mexico, from New Jersey to Florida, from Arizona to California, and many other places.

Nick, who hopes to be a math teacher one day, said he was enjoying the project.

"I think it's a good activity, it gets kids outside, it's something that's interesting, and it's a different type of science," he said. "Science has so many branches; it's hard to cover them all, but you might as well try and cover as many as possible."

Teacher Vandna Guleria said that her seventh graders are working on life sciences, and studying butterflies is an important part of that curriculum.

"They are learning about metamorphosis," she said. "They are learning about the life cycle, and what is the migration pattern of these butterflies – how they come from north to south ... and what is their lifespan also."

Volunteer Mary Ann Everett has been teaching the butterfly science segment.

"I contacted the school and Mrs. Guleria, ... and I asked her if she would consider the seventh grade class doing this," Everett said.

Everett and her husband visited the school to explain the unique features and habits of monarch butterflies, and to help the students recognize the difference between a monarch and a queen butterfly, which looks very similar.

"(The kids) were excited," Everett said. "It's exciting to catch these little flying jewels. ... At first some of the girls were very squeamish, but when we got into it they were all on board."

Christian Demapan, also 12, said that it's tricky to tell the difference between the two butterflies when you're chasing them with a net.

"The only thing that's hard about it is just catching the butterflies," Christian said. "I get really frustrated when I'm like catching queens when we're supposed to catch monarchs. But, you know, it's just all for fun."

Christian said that the class had learned a lot about butterflies and how they are studied in this segment.

"The purpose is just to know where they migrate to, and if they go somewhere why would they go there, and to see if they would change their migration track," he said.

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