



National Park Service
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Ozark National Scenic Riverways

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Ozark National Scenic Riverways News Release

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Local Students Become Citizen Scientists

Van Buren MO – Flying the 1540 miles from Shannon County to Sonora, Mexico would be quite a journey even if you didn't weigh less than a tenth of an ounce, but that's exactly what one local monarch butterfly did. It took him five months to make the journey, averaging about ten miles each day. One may wonder how we know all this. It's thanks to young citizen scientists at three local schools who work with researchers to track the migration of monarch butterflies.

Each fall, students at Eminence, Winona and Van Buren elementary schools participate in the National Park Service's "Butterfly Project." Park Ranger Bill O'Donnell and his wife Julie started the project about ten years ago. Dozens of monarch caterpillars are raised in the O'Donnell's kitchen until they form their emerald green chrysalises. Each classroom is then given a chrysalis. When the chrysalis hatches, the students record the date and gender and other information, then place a numbered tag on the butterfly, and set it free. The University of Kansas provides the tags and handles the record keeping. When a butterfly is found somewhere on its migration, the University can be contacted via a website on the tag.

"One of my favorite back to school traditions is the arrival of Ranger Bill and our monarch chrysalis", says Amy Jackson, a teacher at Van Buren. "My third graders just love anxiously observing its changes. When we finally get to tag and release our butterfly, it is such a powerful moment as it flutters out of view on its journey. Not many things get twenty, eight-year-olds to stare in awestruck wonder!"

"Just that sense of wonder is enough to call the program a success," says O'Donnell. "Finally, after ten years, word came that one of our butterflies had been found." Someone in the state of Sonora, Mexico, across the border from Arizona, found one of the butterflies and e-mailed the University of Kansas. "We've released

over 500 butterflies in the past ten years,” O’Donnell said. “This is our first recovery. They say it’s a one in a thousand chance, but it finally happened!”

The “Butterfly Project” is just one of many educational programs that staff at the Ozark National Scenic Riverways provides free to local schools. Rangers visit classrooms to teach about animals, geology and local history. They also accompany students on field trips to Alley Mill, Round Spring Cave, and other locations to learn about the natural and cultural resources of their own area.

If you would like to get involved with tagging monarchs, go to www.monarchwatch.org to get started. To learn more about Ozark National Scenic Riverways programs for students and teachers, go to www.nps.gov/ozar and click on “Teacher’s Page.”

Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves the free-flowing Current and Jack Fork Rivers, the surrounding natural resources, and the unique cultural heritage of the Ozark people.



Tagged monarchs ready to fly!



Monarch caterpillars on milkweed leaf.



Park Volunteer Julie O'Donnell holding chrysalises.

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