JOURNEY NORTH

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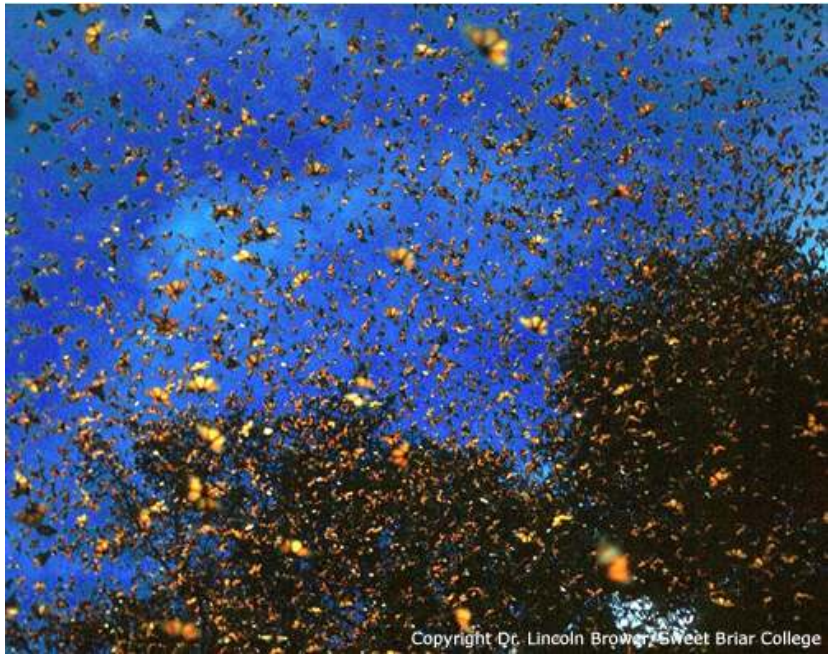
Layout by Margaret Black

JOURNEY NORTH
A Global Study of Wildlife Migration and Seasonal Change

The Monarch's Spring Migration
A Race Against Time

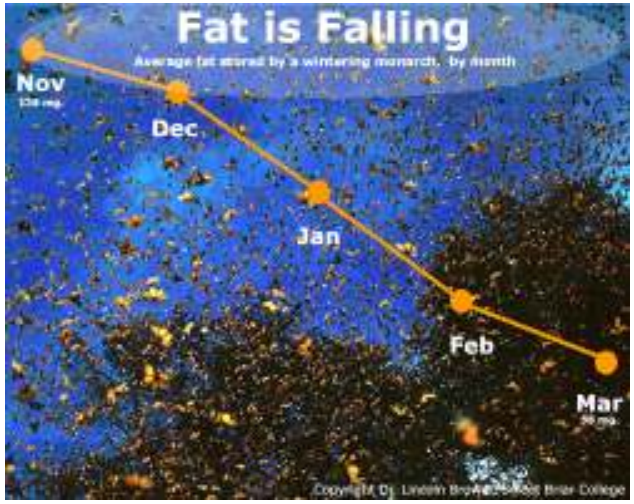


by Elizabeth Howard

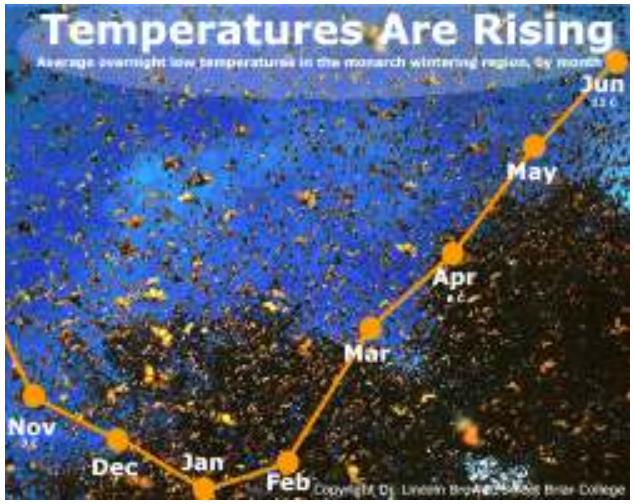
When spring migration begins, monarchs have only a few weeks to live.

Here come the monarchs! Spring migration begins every March in a flurry. The monarchs are in a race against time. They can't stay in Mexico any longer — but they can't move north too quickly either. The timing of their spring migration must be precise. How do they know when to leave, and why do they go now?

Time is running out. The fat the monarchs stored for the winter is almost gone.



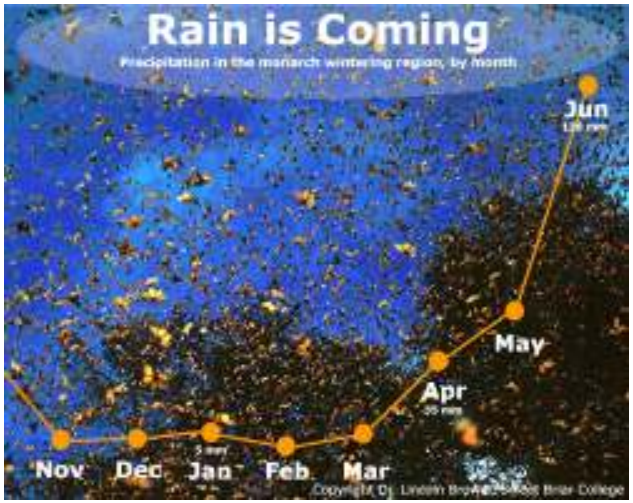
Time is running out because air temperatures are rising at the monarch colonies. As it gets warmer and warmer, the butterflies burn their remaining fat faster and faster.



Time is running out because the rainy season is coming.

"The monarchs have to get out of there before the rains come or they'll be trapped," says Dr. Lincoln Brower.

Monarchs can't fly until their muscles are at least 55 degrees F. On rainy days monarchs can be paralyzed by the cold. They can't bask in the sunshine to warm their muscles.

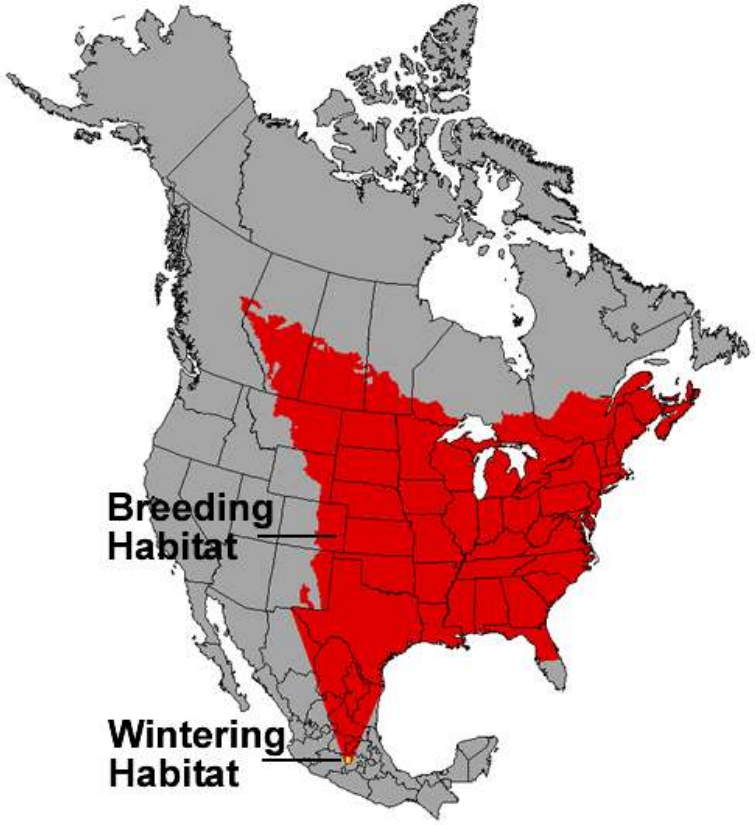


Time is running out because monarchs can only live for a few weeks once they are mature enough to mate.

Their bodies became ready to mate only recently. Now they are quickly approaching the end of their lives.

Time is running out because millions upon millions of monarchs will now need milkweed. Monarchs lay their eggs on milkweed. It is the *only food* their young caterpillars can eat.

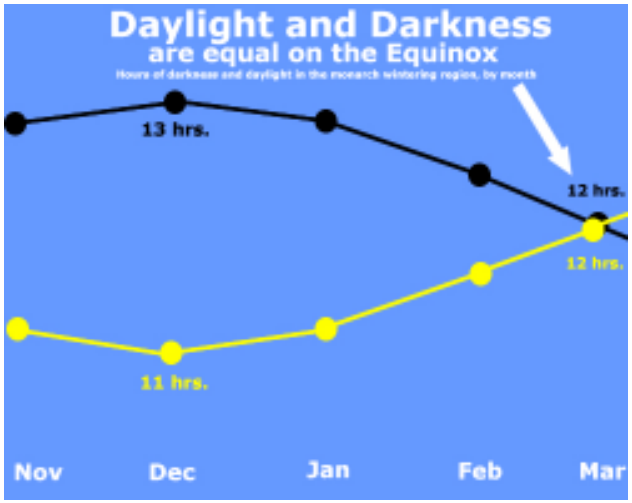
Meanwhile, winter is ending in North America. Milkweed will soon grow across the north. The area in red shows where the monarchs will migrate. Look at how much space the monarchs can have!



So how do the monarchs know when it's time to go? Monarchs must have a precise sense of time or they could not survive!

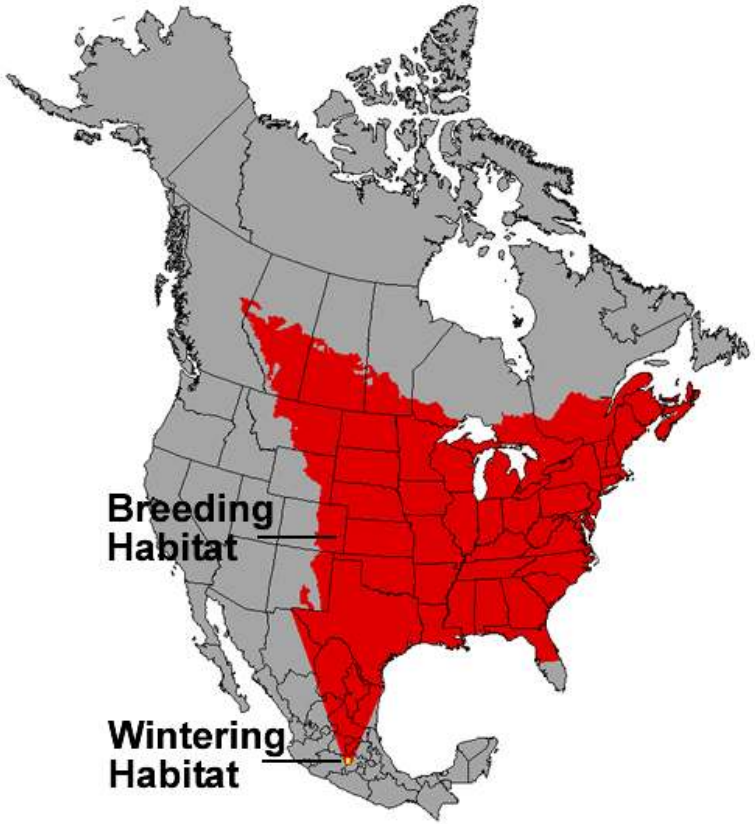
> "Most likely, the spring Equinox is the trigger," says Dr. Lincoln Brower.

Day and night are both 12 hours long on the spring Equinox. The happens every year at exactly the same time (March 21st). If the monarchs use the sun as their clock they can tell when it's time to fly north.



The Equinox is probably the trigger for monarchs to migrate.

And here come the monarchs! They're racing northward with only a few weeks to live. They are carrying the seeds of the next generation. Will the monarch's habitat be ready when the butterflies arrive?



Let's find out as we track the migration this spring!

You can watch how your monarch habitat changes with the season. Monarchs should appear like magic when it's ready. Let us know what you find!

- Please report your "first sightings" of the season…
  http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/monarch/SpringWatch.html

- How to report your sightings…
  http://www.learner.org/jnorth/orientation/PracticeReport.html

First monarch butterfly

First milkweed leaves