



Monarchs occupy 64% larger area in Mexico in 2025–26

On March 17, the National Commission of Protected Natural Areas in Mexico (CONANP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) released data from the winter 2025–2026 monarch population counts. In December 2025, monarchs occupied 2.93 hectares in Mexico, compared to 1.79 hectares at the same time in 2024. This area is slightly higher than the average of 2.81 hectares over the past decade and represents about a 64% increase over last year’s area.

At the wintering sites in central Mexico, where most monarchs from east of the Rocky Mountains overwinter, monarch population size is compared from year to year by the number of hectares (one hectare = 2.47 acres) occupied by trees with clusters of monarchs. WWF and CONANP have been monitoring this area since 2004, with similar data from 1993-2003 collected by the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve (MBBR).

While the number of monarchs clustering in a hectare varies from year to year and is difficult to estimate, our best estimate is that it is about 21 million per hectare.

To read more, [click here](#).

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This newsletter does not cover all the projects funded by the Monarch Butterfly Fund. For more on our work, [click here](#).

Implementation of pesticide risk mitigation strategies

Ana Merlo, a 2021 Lincoln P. Brower Award recipient, is turning her research into action to make a meaningful impact in communities around the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.

During her doctoral research, with Monarch Butterfly Fund support, Ana investigated which pesticides are applied at avocado plantations surrounding the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. Her work revealed not only the types and intensity of agrochemical use, but also their concentrations in water and their implications for human health and ecosystems.

Building on this foundation, Ana has started a new project, titled “Implementation of Pesticide Risk Mitigation Strategies,” also supported by MBF. Ana designed a comprehensive and interactive workshop for farmers and community members interested in improving their knowledge of pesticide risks and safer agricultural practices.

The workshop focuses on:

- How to correctly read and interpret pesticide labels
- Direct human health impacts (acute and chronic exposure)
- Surface mobility of pesticides and pathways to water systems
- Peer-to-peer exchange of agricultural management practices

In December, 118 members of the community of Carpinteros in Zitácuaro (the main avocado-producing area in eastern Michoacán) attended an initial discussion about pesticides, and 39 interested people participated in a workshop afterwards. Understanding acute and chronic diseases linked to pesticide exposure and learning how to properly interpret pesticide labels were among the most valuable pieces of information conveyed.

Ana and her team will continue implementing these workshops in additional Ejidos and communities throughout the region.



Photo: Frida Rivera/Pablo Argueta

MBF supports film screenings from Cielo Rojo

MBF is funding screenings of documentaries produced by Cielo Rojo to educate local people on monarch butterfly conservation and sustainable development in the migratory route. Cielo Rojo is a member of the Monarch Network, a group of 10 non-profit and academic organizations working in and near the MBBR.

Indigenous communities and Ejidos along the monarch butterfly migratory route in Mexico will participate in 18 screenings. This project seeks to strengthen the collective understanding of the complexity of the monarch butterfly's migratory phenomenon, highlighting how this process depends on ecological balance, forest conservation, and the active participation of communities along its migratory route.

You can watch some of these videos [here](#):

Western monarch population increases, still near record lows

During the 29th annual Western Monarch Count, approximately 12,260 monarchs were recorded across 249 sites during the typical peak overwintering period from late November to early December 2025, when monarchs cluster together in groves of trees along California's Pacific coast.

This is the third-lowest tally since the count, led by the Xerces Society, began in 1997, but it's an increase of just over 3,000 monarchs from last winter, when the count was 9,119.

[Read more here.](#)

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Weather monitoring near overwintering sites

Climate monitoring in Sierra Chincua and in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve is a task that cannot be put on hold.

On the initiative of Dr. Lincoln Brower, climate monitoring began in Sierra Chincua in 2005, and since 2008, Dr. Isabel Ramírez has been in charge of following up on it. In June of 2025, with funding from MBF, a new Davis weather station was installed at the foot of Sierra Chincua, at the Alternare training center. And this winter, another station will be installed at the original Sierra Chincua site, which has been monitored since 2005.

These new stations will provide continuity to the historical data series and expand monitoring to cover a larger area. These stations allow for the monitoring of critical variables such as precipitation, temperature, wind direction and speed, humidity, and solar radiation, which enable a better understanding of crucial climate patterns and anomalies and the impact on monarch overwintering behavior.

The information generated by the Sierra Chincua station has been relevant in several scientific articles, technical reports on extreme weather events that have affected Sierra Chincua in the last two decades, and several undergraduate and graduate theses.

Real-time information from the new station located in Alternare, which received funding from MBF, can be found [here](#).



Photo: Isabel Ramírez

Alternare has another successful year of restoration and workshops

This summer, with MBF's support, Alternare reforested 143.29 hectares with 50,936 trees around the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve (MBBR), organizing 750 people from seven indigenous communities and four Ejidos (communal properties).

Additionally, throughout the year, communities in the region continued to benefit from and learn sustainable skills through 132 workshops, reaching 1,105 participants. Workshop topics included sustainable farming, agroecological techniques, and construction of fuel-efficient stoves and cisterns, among many others.

Read more [here](#).



Monitoring fauna at Ejido San Juan Zitacuaro. Photo: Alternare

MBF funding four students via Lincoln P. Brower Awards in 2026

Each year, the Monarch Butterfly Fund financially supports graduate and undergraduate research through our Lincoln P. Brower Award program.

We received lots of great applications this year and have selected the following four proposals for funding:

May Jagodkin, University of Toronto: "Evaluating a potential ecological trap - chemical fingerprinting to measure the use of tropical milkweed by monarch butterflies along the U.S. Gulf Coast"

Allison Shaulis, University of Georgia: "Examining the impacts of rearing habitat complexity on neural development and migratory behavior in monarch butterflies"

Fernanda González Kohrs, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nayarit: "Gender and local perceptions toward community strategies for the conservation of the monarch butterfly habitat"

Olivia Demetrakopoulos, University of Ottawa: "Effects of experimental heatwaves on nectar resources and monarch butterfly nutrition"

Read their abstracts [here](#).

Karen Oberhauser visits MBF-funded projects in Mexico



In February, MBF Board Member Karen Oberhauser traveled to Mexico to visit the overwintering sites and some of the people and projects receiving MBF funding.

Fellow board members Ek del Val de Gortari and Isabel Ramírez joined Karen and others on visits to research sites that are part of the assisted migration study being conducted by Dr. Cuauhtémoc Sáenz-Romero. The photo above shows the group with a three-year-old oyamel fir tree planted at 4,000 meters, above the current range of the species.

Staff from our partner organization Alternare took Karen and others to several sites that benefit from Alternare training programs. They learned about the many ways that Alternare supports sustainable living and development in the community of Zirahuato, where they shared a meal and a tour with women from the community. During visits to forests managed by the Carpinteros and El Paso communities, they learned how forest management and protection involve Alternare staff and community members. They visited two schools near important monarch overwintering sites, and saw how Alternare worked with students, teachers, and family members on reforestation, community gardening, and water conservation.

Karen also visited a middle school right next to El Rosario, one of the largest monarch sanctuaries, where Estela Romero taught a lesson and distributed paper butterflies made by children from the U.S., part of the Symbolic Migration Project.

Read more and see photos from the visits [here](#).

Welcoming new MBF Champions

This year, the Monarch Butterfly Fund welcomed two new Champions, businesses that donate a portion of their proceeds to support MBF's work.

MONARQ Group and Pikes Perk Coffee Roasters became our newest Champions, joining Chantecaille, Sanctuary, FlutterFlyers, and Sunny Mist Blueberries.

Thank you to all our MBF champions who help support important conservation work in Mexico. Learn more about these Champions or become a Champion by clicking [here](#).

Monarch Butterfly Fund supporters

Your donations are making a difference for monarchs. Just as monarchs depend on milkweed, flowers with nectar, and trees for roosting, we depend on our generous donors. Every single contribution counts, and we are deeply grateful. A special thanks to those who have contributed \$100 or more in 2025, and those who donated in memory of loved ones.

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Monarch Butterfly Fund
 139 Lakewood Boulevard
 Madison WI 53704

I have enclosed a check for:

- \$75: buys 400 seedlings for a community nursery
- \$100: plants 100 trees
- \$500: plants 500 trees
- \$1000: one month of staff time to support communities working to restore habitat
- Other _____

Donor Name _____
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Spring 2026 monarch migration update

Monarchs began to depart from their overwintering sites in Mexico early this year. Estela Romero wrote in mid-February that butterflies were already being seen flying north through Angangueo, and the clusters in Sierra Chincua had dissipated.

Estela, writing for Journey North with funding from the Monarch Butterfly Fund, wrote that some monarchs remained in the oyamel fir trees of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve until late March, at which time some monarchs had already been reported in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

As of the end of April, monarchs had reached Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and New York, with a few reports starting to come in from Michigan and Wisconsin.

We also had new tools to track the migration this year. Project Monarch, a collaboration of numerous conservation groups started by Cellular Tracking Technologies and the Cape May Arts & Science Center, placed tracking devices on monarchs last fall and this winter to track individual monarchs' movements.

This impressive technology is providing thousands of data points from trackers weighing no more than a grain of rice, and is showing us how individual monarchs move south and north again this spring as they spread across North America.

Keep up with the migration progress throughout the seasons with Journey North maps and news updates: [journeynorth.org/monarchs/news](https://www.journeynorth.org/monarchs/news), or look at individual monarchs' migration paths by downloading the Project Monarch app.



Photo: Estela Romero, El Rosario Sanctuary