

**Meadow Notes – Third Week of August, 2021**  
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**Milkweed Café Serving the Next Generation**

It's been six weeks since the first report of a Monarch on the milkweed at our Way Station, and about four weeks since I took my first pictures of eggs and caterpillars on the undersides of the milkweed leaves. Since Monarch butterflies have a lifespan of two to six weeks, it's about time for the Generation 2 – the adult butterflies that hatched in the south in early July, migrated north, and mated here -- to be on their way out this world, replaced by their children, Generation 3, which began hatching from eggs laid here in CT four to six weeks ago.

The milkweed plants have been looking more ragged every time I see them, evidence that a lot has been happening at the Way Station.



**Evidence of Monarch caterpillar feeding on milkweed at the Way Station**

I see the small, nearly round holes with "punched" edges in the leaves that represent the location of a hatched Monarch egg. The newly hatched caterpillar creates a little latex-free island of leaf tissue to eat by poking holes in a small circle around itself. Milkweed latex flows out the holes, leaving the tissue inside the perforated circle safe to eat.



**Leaf islands that have been consumed by early-instar Monarch caterpillars.**

Once the leaf island is gone, the caterpillar, now twice its original size, crawls over to the stalk, and punches holes in the base of a leaf until the "joint" between the stem and the leaf is broken. Latex seeps out of the broken spot, making the entire leaf now safe to eat. All of the milkweed plants at our Way Station show little Monarch caterpillar holes as well as broken-off leaf blades. Maybe 10% of the eggs on any one milkweed plant result in full-



grown caterpillars. Once they've reached the end of their fifth molt, they wander away from the plant, find a secluded spot, and pupate: they form chrysalises inside which their bodies metamorphose.



**Entire leaves have been removed from the milkweed plants by hungry caterpillars.**

Every time I visited the Way Station between July 18 and August 7, I saw female butterflies, as well as caterpillars at different stages of development. I have looked in vain for chrysalises, but that doesn't mean they weren't nearby.



The fresh-looking female Monarchs checking out the milkweeds at the Way Station these days are most likely Generation 3.



A female Monarch – likely a Generation 3 individual – visiting the Milkweed Café August 19.



The Milkweed Café is still attracting gravid females, and that is exactly what we hoped it would do! The fact that the mowers have carefully spared this patch of milkweeds all summer has made it possible for two generations (so far) of Monarchs to lay eggs here. The larger patch of flowering weeds continues to bloom, providing a buffet of nectar in many flavors for bees, wasps, and butterflies.



**Nectar plants in the Monarch Way Station** – *Verbena bonariensis* (purple); Purple Coneflower (pink); Daisy Fleabane (white), and Queen Anne's Lace (white).

Only one month to go before the Generation 4 butterflies begin to eclose – the ones that will migrate to Mexico. They'll be the subject of my next post.