

MEXICO | BUTTERFLIES

Monarchs are Mexico's other North American tourists

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Bold splashes of orange speckle the blue sky as countless Monarch butterflies fill the air and land on branches, logs, the ground and even on our heads and shoulders.

The sound is unlike anything we have heard before: a gentle, whispering-like whirl like a million pieces of confetti thrown in the air.

Awestruck visitors speak in hushed tones while witnessing one of nature's breathtaking spectacles.

We're in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site high in the mountains of Michoacan, west of Mexico City.

Migrating Monarchs from east of the Rockies throughout North America overwinter in this mountaintop forest of oyamel fir trees.

Arriving around late November and staying until March, they number in the millions.

Our journey starts with a three-hour bus ride from Mexico City to Zitacuaro, where we transfer to a smaller local bus that winds slowly up the mountains, past cornfields and small villages to Anganguero. Two parts of the reserve, El Rosario and Sierra Chincua, sit even higher up the mountains outside this valley town.

Finding someone to drive us to the reserves is easy. New faces in this small town don't go unnoticed for long.

At the entrance to Sierra Chincua, we can either walk or hire horses to get farther uphill to the viewing area. With altitudes near 10,000 feet, we allow ourselves the luxury of riding up the dusty path.

Leaving the horses, our guide Arturo leads us along the heavily forested path to a ridge that slopes into the valley below.

Before long, we come to a clump of trees thick with butterflies, many of which are already flying around as the mid-morning sun warms the for-



est. We stare at the spectacular sight, content to stay there and watch, but Arturo assures us that ahead it gets even better.

By this time, we shed jackets and sweaters because it feels more like summer than January.

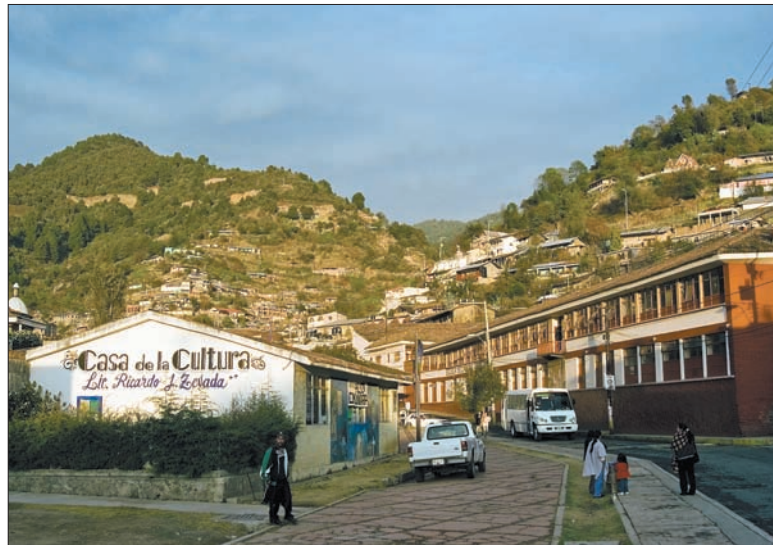
The Monarchs react to the warmth as well. Branches dripping with semi-dormant butterflies come to life as Monarchs take to the air by the tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands. They are everywhere so we move slowly and carefully.

No other butterfly in the world migrates this far and in such large numbers. Their travels are more like bird migrations, but with a twist. Those arriving next year might be the grandkids or great-grandkids of this year's migrants.

How they find their way is still a mystery.

We leave with a feeling of exhilaration, tempered with the realization that this marvel of nature is threatened.

Key parts of the forest are set aside as wildlife reserves, but there is con-



stant pressure from logging interests and illegal logging.

Altering habitats in Canada and the United States, especially the loss of milkweed favoured by Monarch caterpillars, add to the concerns.

On a positive note, Monarchs help the local Mexican economy, long

dependent on mining and subsistence farming.

Locals run most tourist services from guides in the reserves to transport and lodging.

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ABOVE: Thousands of Monarch butterflies perch on tree branches at the butterfly sanctuary near Anganguero, Michoacan, Mexico.

LEFT: Anganguero is a former mining town in the western Sierra Madre Mountains. It is the main centre for visiting Monarch Butterfly sanctuaries nearby, including El Rosario, and Sierra Chincua. |

ROBIN & ARLENE KARPAN PHOTOS

IF YOU GO:

- You can travel on your own to Anganguero, but it's helpful if you know some Spanish.
- Guided excursions run from Mexico City or Morelia and travel agents can arrange trips from other places as well.
- February is generally considered prime time but be prepared for cool mountain air.
- Try to avoid weekends.

LAW | RELATIONSHIP COMPLICATIONS

Meddling in-laws a sure-fire recipe for marital disputes

A PRAIRIE PRACTICE



GAIL WARTMAN, B.A., J.D.

I watched a wonderful movie recently, *Les Misérables*, which is a story that has been presented on stage and in a number of movies over the years.

Although the entire story is fascinating, the part that I found most moving was where the main character, Jean Valjean, discovers that his

beloved adopted daughter, Cosette, has fallen in love with a young man called Marius. Valjean goes from feeling protective and jealous about this relationship to realizing that, as part of his deep love for his daughter, he wants to accept and love the young man she has chosen.

Valjean sings the beautiful song, *Bring Him Home*, praying for the safety of his daughter's young man in the armed rebellion where Marius is in grave danger. When Marius is wounded, Valjean carries him through the sewers of Paris to safety, at great risk to himself, and thereby saves the life of his daughter's beloved.

Anyone who has adult children who are married or in a committed common-law relationship might

want to see that movie and think about Valjean's attitude toward his son-in-law.

When I practiced family law, I observed what I believe was the single most common factor that causes marriages to break down.

Is the main cause addiction, financial irresponsibility or basic incompatibility?

No, in my experience, most often it is interference by parents or other family members of one or both of the marriage partners.

Usually, it is the sad scenario of a controlling parent continuing to monopolize the life of their child and attempting to make him choose between his spouse and his parent, expecting the child to continue to have his first loyalty

to his family of origin.

This can be even more difficult if the young married couple resides or works with the parents. In those cases, both the parents and the young couple need to be respectful of each other's family units.

Money that is loaned or given to the young couple with difficult strings attached often becomes the root of a problem that will fester into marriage breakdown.

Parenting practices and efforts to control the grandchildren as well as the adult children are also often an issue of contention.

It is a recipe for disaster when the parents of an adult child take sides in marital disputes.

The example given by Jean Valjean

of opening his heart to his new son-in-law, loving him like the son he never had and doing whatever he could to make the young couple's marriage successful, is worth remembering.

The role of the parents in the success or failure of their adult children's marriage cannot be overstated.

Respect the choices your children have made, love their spouses like you would love your own children and do whatever you can to support the marriage.

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