

## *Acknowledging Blessing on the Pollen Path*

*by Ina Warren*

Recently Dr Gary Paul Nabhan and I attended several meetings in Washington D. C. as part of a February leadership initiative for “Make Way for Monarchs - A Milkweed-Butterfly Recovery Alliance.”

Immediately prior to journeying north from Asheville, and about the same time the monarchs in Mexico were about to journey north, I had arranged to meet with the student Garden Club of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian Middle School in Cherokee, NC.

After an illustrated lecture on monarch biology and migration, our outside activity was to join in a circle around our containers of milkweed seeds. Weeks earlier I asked if the teacher might arrange for a tribal elder to meet with us and ask a blessing on the seeds.

We were delighted to be greeted by the Coordinator of the **Center for Cherokee Plants**, Mr Kevin Welch for our gathering. He shared with us that the traditional Cherokee did not ask blessings on seed - that they knew the seeds were already blessed from the Creator and it was up to the people to acknowledge that blessing.

And acknowledge we did. Each voluntarily shared what they were grateful for that day. The lovely stories from the students were unforgettable - especially that each was thankful for their Garden Club.

We planted seeds in the raised beds they had built and prepared. Soon they will learn about the “saddlebag-shaped” pollinia that houses the milkweed flower’s pollen grains and how the flowers will be pollinated by long-legged insects such as wasps and yellow jackets.



*Cherokee Middle School biology teacher Mrs. Jessica Metz-Bugg, Joyce Pearsall, Nina Veteto, Ina Warren, Mr Kevin Welch and Garden Club students. Photo by Joey Owle of the Cherokee **Healthy Roots** initiative*

This beautiful February afternoon was for me yet another affirmation that monarch butterflies have led me through most of my adult life on *the Pollen Path*.

*Oh, beauty before me  
beauty behind me  
beauty to the right of me,  
beauty to the left of me,  
beauty above me,  
beauty below me  
I'm on the pollen path.*

- Navajo poem

### Thursday morning, 2/27:

Gary and I met with **US Fish and Wildlife Service** staffers Donita Cotter and Amanda Gonzales from the *Wildlife Without Borders* Office. Our discussions covered the many ways *Make Way for Monarchs* can help advance the efforts of monarch conservation. Amanda also shared stories of the great work **Alternare** is doing in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve in central Mexico and other international conservation efforts.



*Gary, Ina, Donita Cotter and Amanda Gonzales*

Thursday afternoon, Gary presented a lecture, “*Food Chain Restoration and the Milkweed/Monarch Dilemma*” to **Dr David Inouye**’s Conservation Biology classes at the University of Maryland, College Park in the Biosciences Research Building. We had an extended Q&A with students and discussed possible helpful milkweed databases that could be developed by interested grad students. We also met with folks from **Chesapeake Natives, Inc.**, a small nonprofit plant org and the **Monarch Sister Schools Program**. A number of folks from the community also attended.



Gary, Dr David Inouye, and Ina at UMD-College Park

Late Thursday afternoon, we visited the **Oyamel Restaurant** in downtown DC hoping to meet their famous chef Jose Andreas and thank him for creating a special menu that results in donations for monarch butterfly rescue efforts. Though he was not in town, we left monarch thank-you cards and a copy of the “North American Monarch Conservation Plan” book.

As an aside, Monarch Watch Conservation Specialists had been at this very restaurant about eight months earlier to celebrate Dr Karen Oberhauser’s selection as a White House **Champion of Change for Citizen Science**. (The Oyamel’s world famous dessert menu was still dancing like sugar plums in my head!)



Friday, 2/28: A meeting with US Rep. Earl Blumenauer’s office did not materialize as hoped but a full day of programming at Brookside Gardens made for a most worthwhile day.

Gary presented the **Symposium’s** afternoon keynote, “*Tapping into the Wisdom of Traditional Farmers: Sustainably Growing Food in the Face of Climate Uncertainty*” and later participated in the author’s forum/book signing.



I had driven the trusty Toyota to DC so I was able to present a full display on monarch conservation for the packed auditorium to explore. Many took advantage of the free locally-native milkweed seeds available.

Mike Tidwell, director of the **Chesapeake Climate Action Network (C-CAN)** also presented a gripping talk, “*A Maryland Gardner’s Response to Climate Change: More Clean Energy*”. He spoke about the imminent issues of climate change in the Chesapeake Bay area and ways the general public could effect positive change. It was good to see Mike again after we had both been purposely arrested protesting the KXL tarsands pipeline at the White House in August, 2011.

Though Gary and I knew Rachel Carson had lived in Silver Springs, MD, we did not realize the **Rachel Carson House**, now a National Historic Landmark, was only a few miles from Brookside Gardens.

Late that afternoon, Dr Diana Post greeted us and graciously showed us the House and grounds. For an already wonderfully eventful trip, this was the highlight for both of us.

It felt as if we were walking on hallowed ground.

Rachel Carson’s writing tables, bookshelves, even the simple fireplace and mantle are images I still ponder when I consider how difficult the final days of her life must have been for her there.

We owe Rachel Carson a debt that can never be repaid. In her immensely important book, **Silent Spring**, she sounded warnings for us into the future a full half-century ago. When it comes to heeding those warnings about overuse of untargeted chemical pesticides, an old southern Baptist phrase comes to my mind: We have been “backsliding something terrible...”



Dr Diana Post, Dr Gary Paul Nabhan and Ina Warren

I was glad I still had the “blessed and acknowledged” containers of milkweed seeds in the trusty Toyota and thus able to share some with Dr Post to plant in the yard and gardens for monarchs and the many pollinators to be nourished there.

One other highlight from the trip for me was overnight lodging in the Hostel International, in downtown DC, where 9 other women from all over the world and I laughed and shared stories till way past midnight in our dormitory-type room. (Curiously it cost more to park the trusty Toyota on K Street than for a bunk bed in the Hostel each night!) Our paths will never cross again but touching lives with stories of family and travels made the world of the pollen path seem warmer and kinder.



*A favorite quote by Dr Martin Luther King Jr. in the Hostel Dining Room*

A few days later, I attended the Xerces Society’s Pollinator Workshop at UNC-Asheville where there was not only a lot of buzz about native and honey bees, but also about this year’s population decline. It was good to represent *Make Way for Monarchs* in monarch and milkweed discussions throughout the day.



*Ina; Debbie Roos, Chatham County NC Extension Agent; Dr Nancy Adamson of Xerces; Nina Veteto of **Monarch Rescue** and Phyllis Stiles of Bee City USA Asheville.*

The following week I supervised 50+ students from the **Brevard College** Environmental Perspectives Lab on four separate work days in a rewarding and fun community service project. They prepared the soil in advance of later spring planting for 120 native milkweed plugs in 4 separate pollinator gardens on the beautiful Pisgah Ranger District south of Asheville, NC.



*BC students pose for an end of week photo at USFS future waystation site*

Also in early March, I helped plan a “**Trails to Every Classroom**” summer workshop for TTEC teachers with the folks in the Appalachian Trail Regional Office in Asheville.



And what a pleasure to have a *Make Way for Monarchs* display on 3/22 to discuss the upcoming April 14 Day of Action and Contemplation. This venue was the annual Extension Master Gardeners Spring Gardening Symposium.

Having milkweed seeds available at all of these events will get us “inch by inch, row by row” closer to our goal of millions of new milkweeds in the ground this year.

With help from fellow monarch enthusiasts Nina Veteto and Joyce Pearsall of WNC, our monarch conservation outreach continues to grow and bear fruiting pods!

So much beauty awaits those who choose to plant milkweeds.

Yes, I’m on the pollen path.



*A lovely door wreath at the Rachel Carson House featuring milkweed pods.*

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*Supporting links for topics appearing in bolded text:*

<http://www.cherokeepreservationfdn.org/cultural-preservation-connect/success-stories/99-putting-culture-back-in-to-agriculture>

<http://www.fws.gov/international/animals/monarch-butterfly.html>

<http://www.alternare.org>

[http://www.ucsusa.org/global\\_warming/science\\_and\\_impacts/science/climate-scientist-david-inouye.html](http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/science/climate-scientist-david-inouye.html)

[http://www.chesapeakenatives.org/Chesapeake\\_Natives/HOME.html](http://www.chesapeakenatives.org/Chesapeake_Natives/HOME.html)

<http://monarchsisterschools.org>

<http://www.oyamel.com>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/champions/citizen-scientists>

[http://www.montgomeryparks.org/brookside/green\\_matters\\_symposium.shtm#schedule](http://www.montgomeryparks.org/brookside/green_matters_symposium.shtm#schedule)

<http://www.chesapeakeclimate.org>

<http://www.rachelcarsoncouncil.org>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent\\_Spring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Spring)

<http://www.monarchrescue.org>

<http://www.brevard.edu/academics/environmental-studies>

<http://www.appalachiantrail.org/what-we-do/youth-education/trail-to-every-classroom>