

Cole Family Monarch Conservation Center and Butterfly House

Season: Open Spring-early Fall

Breeding: Butterflies start life as hungry caterpillars, growing to over 2000 times their hatchling weight in just 10-14 days. Fast growth means their skins are soon stretched and they go through stages, called instars, where they shed old skin and expand into a new size. Butterfly caterpillars typically have five instars, and as they shed their last old skin, the new skin starts to form a chrysalis (kri·suh·luhs), or pupa. The chrysalis is not a "resting" stage but a time of complete change, or metamorphosis. The body of the caterpillar is becoming an adult butterfly. Wings are fully formed, Antennae are formed and the chewing mouthparts of the caterpillar are transformed into the sucking proboscis of the butterfly. After 10 to 14 days as a chrysalis, the butterfly is ready to emerge, but it's not ready to fly. Its new wings are small and wet, and the butterfly pumps fluids from its abdomen through the veins in its wings, which expands the wings to their full size. Next, the wings dry and the butterfly exercises new flight muscles before it can fly.

Quick Facts:

- Butterflies taste with their feet.
- One of the largest butterflies is the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly.
- Butterflies have 4 wings.
- A group of butterflies is called a flutter.
- Butterflies can see ultraviolet light because they have 6,000 lenses in their eyes.
- There are ~17,500 species of butterflies in the world and 750 species in the US.
- There are 160,000 species of moths and butterflies combined.

Conservation: Protecting butterflies is vital because they are important pollinators. The North Carolina Wildlife Federation has a statewide conservation restoration initiative called the Butterfly Highway. One of the continental approaches for the conservation of monarch butterflies is the North American Monarch Conservation Plan. This Plan is a long-term cooperative agenda between Canada, Mexico, and the US to conserve the monarch butterfly and their migration path.