



Central Iowa SIERRAN

Winter 2015

Central Iowa Group Newsletter

The Magical Monarchs

By Mary Christopher

(Editor's note: This is part 2 of Mary Christopher's article on monarchs. Part 1, which appeared in the summer 2015 newsletter, has technical information on this critter. This part recounts her visit to them in Mexico.)

As a little girl growing up in Iowa, I loved to spot a monarch butterfly fluttering alongside the roadway on one of our Sunday drives. It was a special experience and one that I believed brought very good luck!

As an adult, when I learned that the monarchs migrate to Mexico every year, I wanted to find out more about their migration and their winter destination. So, having planned to visit Mexico City as part of a winter vacation, my boyfriend and I decided to venture up into the mountains to the west and visit the monarchs in their winter home.

I am neither a scientist nor a butterfly expert, so I apologize for any shortcomings in describing this amazing phenomenon. But what we found in Mexico was truly magical, so I will do my best!

We hoped to find that the Mexican people were good stewards of "our" monarchs, and they are. What we were surprised to discover is that we Midwesterners can be better stewards of "their" monarchs!

The monarchs begin to arrive in Mexico in late October and early November, in conjunction with the Mexican celebration of the "Día de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) and are believed by many Mexican people to represent the souls of departed loved ones. Here, too, it is believed that the first one seen brings good luck!

There are four monarch sanctuaries in Mexico that are open to the public, the two most popular of which are El Rosario and Sierra Chincua. The entire Monarch



Butterfly Biosphere Reserve covers 350 square miles and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008.

We chose to stay in the old mountain mining village of Anganguero, only 3 miles from El Rosario. Anganguero is about 3½ hours from Mexico City by car and can also be reached by bus from Mexico City's Observatory station.

Our hotel (the Plaza Don Gambino Hotel) recommended a guide, whom we quickly nicknamed "Super Mario." Mario Bernal Cruz (www.marioecotours.com) has been guiding people to and through the monarch sanctuaries for years. Having spent 10 years in Orange County, California, Mario was able to describe the geographical area and the habits of the monarchs in fluent English; he also pointed out a red warbler and some hummingbirds as well as several varieties of milkweed and other plants.

As we drove into the parking lot of El Rosario, signs cautioned us to "Cuide las mariposas"—to be careful of the butterflies. Forewarned by Trip Advisor writers that El Rosario is the "more touristy" of the public sanctuaries, we expected something more commercial than what we found.

Elderly Mexican women offered hand-embroidered monarch linens for about \$3. Other women in colorful aprons stood in front of outdoor wood stoves cooking squash blossom and cheese-stuffed blue tortillas, serving them with ice-cold Mexican beers. Rows of tiny oyamel trees lined a terraced hill, and horses milled behind them.

We bought our entry tickets for about \$2.75 each. Having a choice between "hoofing" it up into the forest on foot or on horseback (an additional \$5.50 each), we chose the horses. We treated Super Mario to his own horse, as the horses took a different route than the walkers and

we wanted to have him with us to tell us about various plants and birds on the way. Led by young men, the horses thankfully took us about three-fourths of the way up the trail, where we were helped to dismount so that we could walk the remainder of the way.

When we saw a small crowd not far up ahead, we knew that we would soon see the monarchs!

They clung to the fir trees in such large numbers that the branches drooped from their weight. Their area of the forest was roped off, so we watched them from afar. Mario cautioned us ahead of time about the rules—no flash photography, no loud talking, and no touching or taking the

monarchs—and the crowd was respectful and quiet. Everyone gazed at the trees, which were completely covered with sleeping, folded-winged monarchs, presumably exhausted by their long journey.

Suddenly, the sun came out from behind the clouds and filtered down through the trees. The monarchs began to spring to life and flutter around in the warmth of its rays. The crowd stood mesmerized, listening to the magical sound of millions of monarch wings.



Sources for this article:

Mario Bernal Cruz, *tour guide from Anganguero, Mexico* (www.marioecotours.com).

The New York Times, "For Monarchs: A Long Road Back," 11/18/14.

The Xerces Society, "Wings: Essays on Invertebrate Conservation," Fall 2014.

www.americanforrests.org

www.ecosystemgardening.com

For information about milkweed restoration, a free guide called "Milkweeds: A Conservation Practitioner's Guide" may be downloaded from www.xerces.org

Thanks to Donors and Bidders at 2015 Fundraiser

People walked off with some wonderful items: gift certificates, books, photos, and objects of art. All were donated to support the 2015 Fundraiser for the Central Iowa Group. Over \$800 was raised at the October 21st annual silent auction. We thank the members of our community for their generous donations. The money will be used to enable our own Central Iowa Group to secure lands needing protection, to send kids to camp, and to continue our outreach programs.

If your bid won, would you please thank the donor for supporting the environment and the Sierra Club? And again, thank you for supporting this event.



Attendees listen to the travelogue presentation by Ray and Margaret Harden

2015 Donors:

Ace Hardware (Johnston)
Alba
Back Country Outfitters
Beaverdale Books

Bill Miller
BRR Ride
Campbell's Nutrition
Dallas Co Conservation
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Grounds for Celebration
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Kyle's Bikes
Learning Post
Panera Bread (Johnston)
Papa John's Pizza
Phyllis Goodman
Polk County Conservation Board
Prairie Point Book Store
Raccoon River Valley Bicycle
Ray and Margaret Harden
Reiman Gardens
Rich's Brew
Sarah's Hallmark
Sportsman's Warehouse
Zumi

Ray and Margaret Harden: Keynote Speakers

Margaret and Ray Harden visited Nepal December 15th to December 30th, 2014. They shared many of the exciting adventures while in Nepal including wildlife observation, hiking, whitewater rafting, camping and meeting local people. They feel lucky they were able to see this beautiful country and interesting culture before the earthquake in April, 2015.

New Newsletter Editor Needed

If you would like to help the Group's newsletter, please apply for the Newsletter Editor position. As the current editor, I will no longer do this newsletter after the Winter edition.

If interested, please contact:
Phyllis Goodman goodmanph@mchsi.com

Central Iowa Group Directory

(See directory in Chapter newsletter for state and national information)

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Secretary, Sandy Simmons	288-1811
Vice Chair, Debbie Neustadt	263-0297
Treasurer, Ginger Soelberg	253-0232
Membership Chair, Phyllis Goodman	274-4319
Conservation Chair, Jane Clark & Ginger Soelberg	223-5047 253-0232
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Do You Want to Receive Future Central Iowa Newsletters?

This May Be Your Final Notice! Don't Let Us Lose You!

As this is the last printed edition of the newsletter for both the Iowa Chapter and its groups (Central Iowa, etc.) we strongly suggest you sign up to receive future newsletters via email.

Send your email address with your name and address to: Membership.services@sierraclub.org

After the Membership looks you up, you will be added to our group of newsletter recipients. This affects only the delivery of the paper copy of our newsletter to Central Iowa Sierra members; the paper magazine sent out bi-monthly by National Sierra Club will continue to be sent via mail to all members.

The Eastern Fox Snake

A Common Iowa Snake
By Ray Harden

“Look how it blends in with the leaf litter,” Mary Teresa Fallon said as we watched a baby fox snake crawl away, heading toward Frog Creek. I had gone to her house to identify the snake, which she discovered in her laundry room. Her husband David caught it and put it in a bag so I could take a picture of it.

Eastern fox snakes are very common in Iowa and are found statewide and across the upper Midwest. Their preferred habitat is the wooded areas along streams, but they can be seen around farmsteads and even in cities, where they occasionally find their way into garages and sheds.

The one at Mrs. Fallon’s house was young; it probably hatched from its leathery egg late last summer. It was less than ten inches long, but full-grown adult fox snakes can reach lengths up to five feet.

The fox snake’s dominant markings are large brown spots in the center of its back and smaller brown spots on its sides. The most distinctive feature is a dark line from the back of its jaw that angles down to its belly. An adult may have a reddish-orange tint on its head. Young fox snakes have different markings, more of a gray background color and lighter spots that are outlined in black. The baby’s head has black lines across the top and on the sides.

The fox snake is usually docile. We handled the one Mrs. Fallon found for several minutes and it did not become agitated. However, all creatures will defend themselves if they are frightened, cornered, or attacked. Sometimes a fox snake will seem hostile. It will coil, hiss, shake its tail, and even strike to scare away an enemy. Another defense is releasing a smelly musk from the scent gland at the base of its tail. According to the Iowa Herpetology Association, the musk smells like the scent of a red fox, giving the snake its common name.

Eastern fox snakes are not poisonous. Their markings give them an appearance similar to those of prairie king snakes and bull snakes, and they have

Central Iowa Sierra Opposes Ending Composting by MWA

The Metropolitan Waste Authority (MWA) handles much of central Iowa’s waste. They are in the process of reconsidering separating yard waste, currently collected and turned into compost at their facility.

This is a complicated issue. As of the writing of this article, the MWA is postponing any yard waste changes for about a year. Below are the comments made by our Group’s chair, Karen Tigges, at the MWA September 16 public meeting.

“The Iowa Chapter and the Central Iowa Group of Sierra Club support policies that move to zero landfill waste. The only items that should be put in a landfill are those that cannot be recycled or composted. We do not support adding yard waste to landfills for the following reasons. Yard waste, food waste, and organic material from manufacturing processes (hulls, seeds, stems) are best used to make compost, a valuable soil amendment. Landfills require a large footprint - acres of land. That land could be put to better uses than landfill.

Under landfill conditions, organic material forms methane. Small landfills flare the methane, which adds carbon dioxide to the air. Carbon dioxide contributes to climate change. Larger landfills capture the methane and can use it like natural gas. If methane escapes from a landfill, it is more potent of a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, although it is shorter-lived. Compost

sometimes been confused with copperheads. There are no copperheads in central Iowa, and only a few were reported in southeastern Iowa fifty years ago.

Eastern fox snakes make every effort to avoid contact with humans by crawling into a hole or hiding in leaves or brush; they can also climb trees and swim. Usually they lie waiting for food to come to them, feeding on mice, frogs, birds, eggs, and small rodents. They wrap their bodies around their prey, squeezing it until it stops breathing, and then they swallow it whole. They are helpful animals to have around because they eat rodents that cause damage to crops and mice that are problems for humans.

Des Moines Has a New Environmental Book Club

By Phyllis Goodman

Looking for a book club with an environmental theme? A new one, the Environmental Book Club, was formed by Lonnie Cleland this past summer. The purpose of the club is to provide a setting for a wide variety of people to share environmental ideas in a welcoming and civil way. In September, members read *Oil and Honey* by 350.org founder and environmental activist Bill McKibben, who tells the story of one year’s honey crop and the social movements that this impacts.

The club meets at Beaverdale Books in the Beaverdale shopping area in Des Moines. Alice Meyer, who owns the book store, said that members usually meet on the third Saturday of each month but call the store ahead of time, as meetings are sometimes rescheduled.

You can contact Beaverdale Books by calling (515) 279-5400.

2. Be sure to write your name and return address in the upper left corner of the envelope. We need your name to check your member identification number and separate individual from joint ballots. The names will then be blacked out before the envelopes are opened.

3. Mail the ballot to:
Central Iowa Sierra Group Election Ballot
3839 Merle Hay Road, Suite 280
Des Moines, IA 50310

does not emit methane gas.

Landfills leak. Modern landfills are built with liners that are supposed to retain liquid leachate. That leachate is collected and processed as a liquid waste. However landfill technology is not perfect in preventing leachate from entering the ground and moving into Iowa’s lakes, rivers, and streams.

Conclusion

While composting requires the use of fossil fuels to power the engines that mix the piles and inject oxygen into the system (to promote aerobic, as opposed to anaerobic decomposition) the environmental impact of these emissions is very small compared to the potential of regenerating the microbiota of impoverished soils, since the health of a soil depends directly on the quantity and diversity of the microorganisms living in it, and Iowa soils constantly suffer from imbalances in microbiota populations due to the extensive use of agricultural and household chemicals.

Furthermore, we feel a culture of recovery and recycling, rather than waste and disposal, should be encouraged among households, who in turn may benefit from the end product. We should no longer consider a throw-away society to be the norm, nor facilitate that ethic.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Tigges
Chair, Central Iowa Sierra Club”

The Value of Composting

(Editor’s note: Below is the EPA discussion of the value of compost.)

Using compost can result in a variety of environmental benefits. The following are a few of the most important ones:

Compost enriches soils

Compost has the ability to help regenerate poor soils. The composting process encourages the production of beneficial micro-organisms (mainly bacteria and fungi) that break down organic matter to create humus. Humus—a rich, nutrient-filled material—increases the nutrient content in soils and helps soils retain moisture. Compost has also been shown to suppress plant diseases and pests, reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, and promote higher yields of agricultural crops.

Compost helps to clean up (remediate) contaminated soil

The composting process has been shown to absorb odors and treat semivolatile and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including heating fuels, polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and explosives. It has also been shown to bind heavy metals and prevent them from migrating to water resources or being absorbed by plants. The composting process degrades and, in some cases, completely eliminates wood preservatives, pesticides, and both chlorinated and nonchlorinated hydrocarbons in contaminated soils.

Compost helps prevent pollution

Composting organic materials that have been diverted from landfills ultimately avoids the production of methane and leachate in the landfills. Compost has the ability to prevent pollutants in stormwater runoff from reaching surface water resources. Compost has also been shown to prevent erosion and silting on embankments parallel to creeks, lakes, and rivers and to prevent erosion and turf loss on roadsides, hillsides, playing fields, and golf courses.

Using compost offers economic benefits

Using compost can reduce the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides. Compost is a marketable commodity and a low-cost alternative to standard landfill cover and artificial soil amendments. Composting also extends municipal landfill life by diverting organic materials from landfills, and it provides a less costly alternative to conventional methods of remediating contaminated soil.

Hazardous Waste Disposal

While the Metro Waste Authority tackles our garbage and lawn debris, we need to tackle household hazardous waste. Paints, cleaners, oils, batteries and pesticides often require special care when disposing of them. Putting them out with the trash, or unthinkably down a drain, can pollute the environment and pose a threat to humans.

The Metro Waste Authority’s Regional Collection Center, in Bondurant will take these hazardous materials and safely dispose of them. They are open Tuesday to Friday, 1-5 pm and Saturday 8-noon.

The waste disposal is often free of charge, but a small fee may apply to some items, so call first:
1105 Prairie Drive, Bondurant, IA | 515 967-5512

Central Iowa Group Elections

Ballot Instructions:

1. Cut the ballot from the page and mark your votes. Vote for no more than four candidates. Ballots with more than four candidates marked will not be counted. Individual members mark their votes in the left-hand column. For joint memberships, one person must use the left-hand column to vote, and the second person must mark his or her vote in the column marked “joint member.”

Central Iowa Sierra Group Election Ballot		
	Individual Member	Joint Member
Peggy Brown	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jane Clark	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lori Reilly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ginger Soelberg	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write-In	_____	_____
Write-In	_____	_____
BALLOTS MUST BE RETURNED BY JAN. 4, 2016		

CENTRAL IOWA SIERRA CLUB WINTER 2015 CALENDAR

PLEASE CALL THE OUTING LEADER IF YOU PLAN TO GO ON ANY OUTINGS. This helps the outing leader plan and alerts you to possible changes. Everyone, including non-members, is welcome to attend programs and outings. Children are also welcome to attend with their parents or caretakers unless otherwise indicated by the outing leader. In order to participate in an outing, you (or your parent or guardian if under 18) will need to sign a liability waiver. To read a copy of the waiver, please call 415-977-5630. Carpooling on outings is encouraged but is strictly a private arrangement among participants, and participants assume all risks associated with such travel. All telephone numbers in this listing are area code 515 unless otherwise indicated.

DECEMBER EVENTS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5: 6:00 P.M.

Sierra Holiday Party

Join us to celebrate the holidays as another year of conservation efforts, learning, and outdoor enjoyment draws to a close. Mark your calendar and plan to bring your favorite holiday treat or beverage to share. Call or text Karen at 515-865-8773 or email: kktigges@live.com for more information.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, HIKE: 1:30 P.M.

Summerset State Park

Summerset State Park is in Warren County, 7-miles south of Des Moines. Those of you who joined a Summer hike here in 2014 will remember how beautiful the views were of the lake when seen from the upper rim. The view is even more stunning with the presence of snow or ice. Let's meet at the Petco store located in the northeast corner of the Southridge Mall parking lot. From there we will drive south along Hwy 69. Upon arriving at the Summerset Park, we will re-form at the parking lot just inside the main gate and soon drive a couple minutes further to another well-maintained parking lot, favored by fisherman. A well-known trail will then lead hikers to winter sights---and the tracks of fox, deer, & wild turkeys. Hiking boots will be required, as well as suitable clothing for cold conditions. Difficulty level: easy to moderate. Contact George at 745-7563 for more information.

REMINDER: NO DECEMBER PROGRAM

JANUARY EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 7:00 P.M.

Central Iowa Sierra Program NORTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie

Mayor Frank Cownie will discuss his recent participation in the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris where he met with more than 100 mayors from around the world. Mayor Cownie was first elected mayor of Des Moines in 2003. In his 12 years as leader of the city where he was born and raised, he has forged a reputation for relentless environmental advocacy coupled with a national and global focus. Mayor Cownie



created and led the Mayor's Task Force on Energy and Environment, which brought together representatives from across the community to collaborate on environmental and energy efficiency issues. This task force ultimately led to the Des Moines City Council adoption of guiding principles for the city's green initiatives. He led the initiative to have the first LEED Certified Building constructed in Des Moines.

Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information about this program.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 7:00 P.M.

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER Rick Cruse on Soil Erosion and Water Issue

Richard "Rick" Cruse will be speaking about the future of soil and water resources as it relates to global food security and to Iowa's environment.

Rick is a professor in agronomy at Iowa State University and director of the Iowa Water Center. He received his undergraduate degree from Iowa State University and graduate degrees from the University of Minnesota. Rick is a fellow of the American Society of Agronomy and the Soil Science Society of America. He received the President's Leadership Award from Soil and Water Conservation Society in 2011. He is currently president

of the U.S. National Institutes for Water Resources. His research focus is soil erosion and water related issues. He also claims to be the world's second best fisherman.

Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information about this program.

MARCH EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 7:00 P.M.
NORTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER
Program to be announced

Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information about this program.

APRIL EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 7:00 P.M.
NORTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER
Whiterock Conservancy, by Liz Garst

Liz Garst will present a program about Whiterock Conservancy ... its mission and some its initiatives, most especially those associated with sustainable agriculture. She will give her views as a farmer and landowner on some of the conservation topics of our day. Liz manages farm land and banks on behalf of her family and is active in environmental organizations and efforts. She is currently on the Board of Whiterock Conservancy, founded by her family, and is also on the board of the Iowa Environmental Council.

According to their website, Whiterock Conservancy is a 5,500 acre non-profit land trust that balances sustainable agriculture, natural resource protection and public recreation on the landscape. Located near Coon Rapids, Iowa along seven miles of the Middle Raccoon River valley, it is open to the public every day for recreation and exploration.

Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information about this program.

MAY EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 7:00 P.M.
NORTHWEST COMMUNITY CENTER
Program to be announced

Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information about this program.

ALSO OF INTEREST

**Cross-Country Ski Outing
to Maplelag Resort, Callaway, MN
Thursday - Sunday, January 28 - 31, 2016**

This will be our 16th trip to Maplelag! Go north January 28- 31, 2016, for a weekend of cross-country skiing on 64 kilometers of groomed trails at this secluded, family-operated resort near Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, voted No.



1 cross-country ski resort in North America. Ski trails of varying length and difficulty (from beginner to advanced) wind through forests, wetlands, and along lake shores. Amenities include the largest hot tub in Minnesota, steam room, saunas, massage therapists,

and a library and game room in the main lodge,. All-you-can-eat gourmet meals are served family style in the stained-glass-lined dining room. Between meals, refuel from the free beverage bar and bottomless cookie jars. Brush up on your ski skills with a personalized lesson, or enjoy snow shoeing, ice skating, or kick-sledding as well. Our accommodations are in the Northern Pacific Lodge in the spacious, knotty-pine-styled Miles City suite with a living room, 16 beds in 4 sleeping rooms (with accommodations for singles, couples, and small families), 3 bathrooms w/ showers, and a view of the lake.



Two departure options: Leave Thursday morning and arrive at Maplelag in the late afternoon, or leave

Thursday evening (with a motel stay in the Twin Cities area Thursday night) and arrive at Maplelag by Friday noon. Return home Sunday after lunch and arrive home Sunday evening. Carpooling may be an option. The \$385 fee (\$109-\$199 for children & teens) includes 2 nights lodging, 6 meals, and most facilities and amenities (Friday afternoon through Sunday lunch) and is payable to Maplelag at the end of your stay. You can add the additional night Thursday with three additional meals for \$94 more (\$15-\$45 for children & teens). A 10% additional discount applies for families. Cross-country ski and snowshoe rental, ski waxing, ski lessons, and massages available for additional charges. Deposits are non-refundable but transferable. Skill level: None required. Difficulty level: Easy to strenuous, depending on trails/activities selected. **Contact Doug at 515-865-8027 or aupperle.douglas(at)gmail(dot)com to sign up.** Go to www.maplelag.com for more information about the resort as well.



Help Us Celebrate the Centennial of the National Park Service


In 2016 the National Park Service will celebrate its 100th anniversary. The Sierra Club will be joining the celebration, working with the Obama Administration and other groups to both mark the occasion and connect an even broader swath of Americans with the next century of conservation.

The Sierra Club has a long history with our national parks. John Muir was one of the earliest advocates of the national park idea. Today we want to be among the groups leading the way in ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access the outdoors--whether it's a park down the street or one of our national wonders.

Planning is currently underway to kick off the celebration with 100 outings during National Park Week (April 16-24, 2016). A summer of celebration events will follow the kick-off, culminating around the actual Centennial in August.

Watch for more information on local outings as the celebrations evolve!

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iowa.sierraclub.org/ciag