

# Tropical Milkweed Harms Monarch Butterflies



*Monarch on Tropical Milkweed.*

Monarch butterflies breeding on Tropical milkweed host higher levels of OE (Ophryacystis elektroscirra - OE) protozoa, a debilitating parasite that infects them. Infected adults harbor thousands or millions of microscopic spores on their bodies. Infected monarchs can fail to emerge from their pupal stage, or live shorter lives, and they cannot fly as well as healthy individuals.

Infections occur along inter-breeding locations in the southern U. S. migratory route, where resident monarchs spread parasites to migratory



*Butterfly Weed with 3 Monarch caterpillars.*

individuals when they mate with each other or lay eggs on the same plants. As the overall North American monarch population becomes smaller, winter-breeding monarchs may make up a



*Monarch on Swamp Milkweed*

larger share of the population, increasing infection rates. The potential for impact is clear. Saving Birds believes it is prudent to err on the side of caution and avoid anything that could lead to a decline in monarch health.

As gardeners incorporate Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) into their landscapes, OE infections will increase. We hope that, as people become aware of the monarchs' plight, they will opt to plant milkweed species native to their areas. If we want to help monarchs, it is essential to understand the effect that increased planting of this alien milkweed has. It certainly will not help our beloved orange and black butterfly.



**Provided by Saving Birds Thru Habitat**  
**5020 North Putnam . • P.O. Box 288**  
**Omena, MI 49674-0288**  
**(231) 271-3738**  
**Website: [www.savingbirds.org](http://www.savingbirds.org)**