

# It was a bad summer for butterflies too



TIMOTHY NOWICKI

She had planted several species of flowers, which are nectar sources for butterflies of our area, but only a handful were spotted at them. Even when she

traveled to nearby Windsor she observed just a few butterflies at a garden there.

This has been a bad summer for butterflies, animals and plants in general. It started with the cold freezing temperatures we had in early spring. Flowers from fruit trees and bushes, like apples and blueberries, were killed. This in turn lowered the yield of mature fruits in fall.

Young wildlife were in nests about the time we had some freezing nights in May. Tree swallow young were very vulnerable to the cold temperatures. For the adults, it was a real catch 22. Cold weather meant they had to brood their young and keep them warm, but when they did they were unable to catch insects in which to feed them. When they did get out to feed,

what insects were around were too cold and did not fly, thus making it very difficult for the adults to find adequate food. Ultimately many young nestlings died.

Cold temperatures also curtail the development of insects such as butterflies and moths. They may remain in the egg or pupa (chrysalis, or cocoon) stage until conditions are right for their development. In July there were a few warm days with some rain which allowed some butterflies to emerge but they were few and later than normal.

A butterfly count, conducted by the Farmington Area Naturalists at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills, yielded 100 fewer individuals than the previous count at the same time last year.

Last summer was a good time for the beautiful orange and black

monarch butterfly. Cold temperatures in the mountains of Mexico, where they overwinter, killed an estimated 50 percent of them. That meant there were fewer individuals returning to the United States this summer to lay eggs and produce individuals for us to see.

Plant and animal populations are adapted to normal conditions - within a certain tolerable range. However, when situations become extreme, like the temperatures we experienced this year, their production and or populations will decline.

It may take a couple years of normal conditions to return to average levels. But in all likelihood that is exactly what will happen.

Tim Nowicki is a naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park in Oakland County.



ILLUSTRATION BY TIMOTHY NOWICKI

Butterflies: Unusually cold weather this year has adversely affected a lot of things, including the number of butterflies.

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