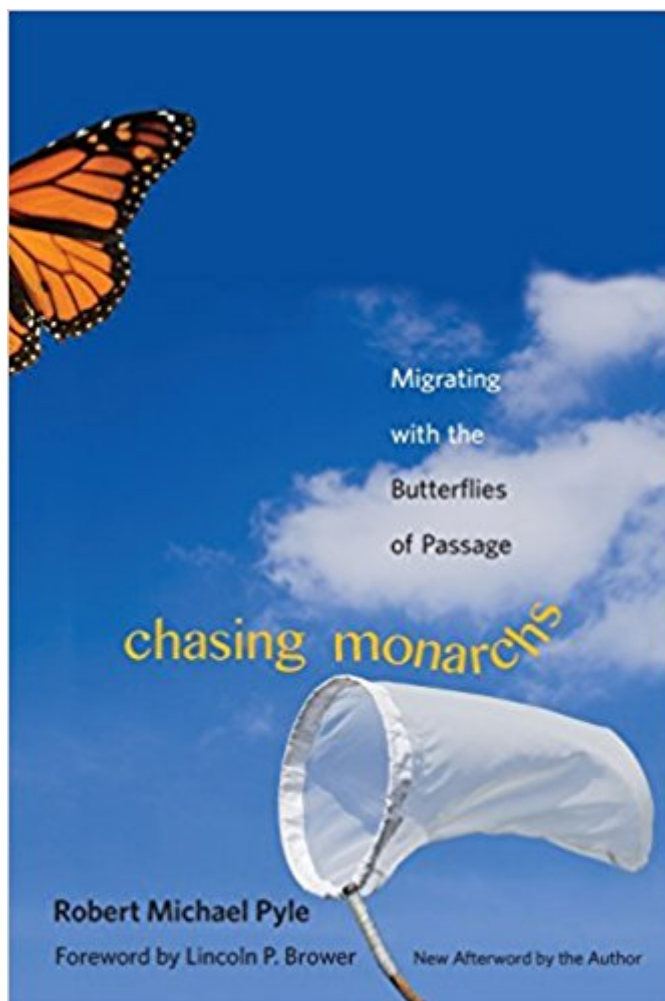


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Chasing Monarchs: Migrating With The Butterflies Of Passage



Synopsis

Pyle's classic account of discovery along the migration trail of monarch butterflies is part natural history, part road trip adventure. Although no one had ever followed North American monarch butterflies on their annual southward journey to Mexico and California, in the 1990s there were well-accepted assumptions about the nature and form of the migration. But to Robert Michael Pyle, a naturalist with long experience in monarch conservation, the received wisdom about the butterflies' long journey just didn't make sense. In the autumn of 1996 he set out to uncover the facts, to pursue the tide of "cinnamon sailors" on their long, mysterious flight. *Chasing Monarchs* chronicles Pyle's 9,000-mile journey to discover firsthand the secrets of the monarchs' annual migration. Part road trip, part outdoor adventure, and part natural history study, Pyle's book overturns old theories and provides insights both large and small regarding monarch butterflies, their biology, and their spectacular migratory travels. Since the book's first publication, its controversial conclusions have been fully confirmed, and monarchs are better understood than ever before. The Afterword for this volume includes not only updated information on the myriad threats to monarch butterflies, but also various efforts under way to ensure the future of the world's most amazing butterfly migration.

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Customer Reviews

A long-standing bit of American nature folklore holds that monarch butterflies west of the Rocky

Mountains migrate to wintering grounds in California, whereas those east of the Rockies migrate to wintering grounds in Mexico--and that the two classes of monarchs never meet and mix. Robert Pyle, a lepidopterist and nature writer, decided as a matter of curiosity to test the verity of this observation. His loosely conceived experiment took him over much of western North America, from a monarch breeding ground deep in the forests of British Columbia to the pine-clad mountainsides of central Mexico. His long journey forms the narrative frame for the aptly titled *Chasing Monarchs*, a book that mixes literate, and often funny, travelogue with the natural history of *Danaus plexippus* and its relatives. Pyle takes his readers along countless dirt roads, forest paths, cliffs, and milkweed-lined meadows to follow his quest, which he describes with plain elegance: "I'll find a monarch. I will watch it. If it flies, I'll follow it as far as I can. When I lose it, I'll take its vanishing bearing--the direction in which it disappears. Then I will quarter the countryside, by foot and by road, until I find the next suitable habitat along that bearing, and do it again." The landscape changes constantly in Pyle's quest, keeping things interesting, and Pyle imparts his evident, abundant affection for butterflies to his readers, a contagiously joyful interest that they come to share as his story progresses. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Scientists know that monarch butterflies migrate thousands of miles each year between northern parts of the U.S. and Mexico or California, but no one has actually seen how they do it. So ecologist Pyle (*Where Bigfoot Walks*) decided to try. His method: to find individual butterflies at their northernmost habitat, follow them as far as possible, then repeat the process with other individual butterflies along the southward route. Amazingly, this haphazard approach worked. Pyle began near the Canadian border, at the Columbia River, and followed monarchs to the Mexican border. Covering 9462 miles in 57 days and proving that western monarchs do not all migrate to California, as commonly believed. Though Pyle's account of his rambling trip suggests that much of it must have been more fun to live through than to read about, he enlivens uneventful sections with butterfly arcana, humorous reminiscences and rueful observations on the environmental impact of cattle ranching, pesticides, dams and jet skis. Pyle's laid-back humor is appealing, his descriptive talents are often poetic (he remembers monarchs pouring into a Mexican valley "like a heavy orange vapor" in which individuals resembled "flecks of foam and water as they top a waterfall and plunge down into the foaming mass"). His memoir serves both as tribute to this majestic insect and as a thoughtful tour of the contemporary American West. Detailed sectional maps would have enhanced the book's appeal; endpaper map not seen by PW. (Aug.) FYI: Pyle is currently editing a

collection of Vladimir Nabokov's butterfly writings. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.
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I read Robert Michael Pyle's book, "Mariposa Road," so I had to read this book, also. They have become two of my favorite books. Pyle covers a lot of territory on his journey searching for Monarchs. I enjoyed his creative writing, wit and great sense of humor when describing the nature he encountered, even human nature. He has made me more aware of the troubling Monarchs. Milkweed is now growing in my yard in hopes to lure Monarchs to lay eggs.

Learned about monarchs and along the way took a virtual road trip through America.

Bob Pyle has given us an insightful look into the butterfly lover's life and inspirations. This a nice way to review your own feelings about conservation, the natural world, and how you spend your time. Traveling will never be the same again for me. Now I can boldly ask any convenience store clerk, "Have you seen any Monarchs lately?" This book is a travel log, a natural history lesson, and an expansive look at the world around us.

What a pleasure it has been to follow these very unique wonderful butterflies on their long journey north then south.

Very neat book. A friend borrowed it, and I have yet to get it back!!

I was fascinated by the subject matter and impressed by the positive reviews. However, the reader is horrible. His style is not to read, but to emote in an affected style like a bad Shakespearean actor. I tried twice to listen to the narrative, but his voice was like fingernails on a blackboard and I could only last 10 minutes. Get the print version and spare yourself some auditory pain.

I'm amazed no one else wrote about this book. Lepidopterists know it, and Pyle, well. My friends at the New York Butterfly Club put me on to this book and Kurt Johnson's Nabokov's Blues. They are both great books. Pyle's book takes you on a journey from the Pacific Northwest all the way to Mexico, following the annual fall migration of these magnificent orange butterflies. You not only learn about butterflies but a historical travelog of much of the old west, tidbits of local history, fantastic scenery and lots of scientific adventure and daring. Conservation issues are the internal

lesson, so you have a worthwhile message along with a great story. The other book, about Nabokov's science is similar-- a great adventure story with butterflies, and a great novelist/writer as central character. Someone told me butterflies are about as popular now as dinosaurs. Its easy to see why. I live and work in the city, so reading about the great outdoors is a great break and fascination. Its wonderful that respected scientists are telling fascinating stories about the creatures they study. You can't go wrong with either of these books.

This is a great book detailing a threatened bio-phenomenon. As always, you can't go wrong with one of Bob Pyle's books!

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