

## Observation of the Monarch butterfly *Danaus plexippus* (LINNAEUS, 1758) in Callas, Var, France in early June 2025

by  
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On June 5<sup>th</sup> 2025, around 4 pm the first author saw a Monarch butterfly *Danaus plexippus* (LINNAEUS, 1758) in his garden just below the village of Callas (Var, France). The butterfly was a ♀ hovering in small circles about a meter above the ground, possibly looking for a host-plant on which to lay its eggs. Unfortunately, no camera was available to record this magnificent butterfly, which shortly afterwards disappeared into the vegetation.

About 15 minutes later, the Monarch was spotted flying in the greenhouse, with wings being in perfect condition (fig. 1, 2). The absence of the thick black scent gland (on vein M1) on the upper side of the hindwing (fig. 3, 4) indicated that it was indeed a ♀ (fig. 1, 2, 5). Would it be possible to obtain eggs from it for a rearing attempt in captivity?

The Monarch is best known as a migratory butterfly that migrates over several generations between Mexico and North America including Canada. The main host-plant used there is *Asclepias curassavica* (Apocynaceae) on which the caterpillars feed, but other species of this family are also used for ovipositing.

Since there are no host-plants in the immediate vicinity, the butterfly was placed in a large cage (200 x 50 x 50 cm), equipped with nectar plants and tubes with diluted honey. We hoped to find a suitable host-plant in various garden centres, but without success.

The next day, June 6<sup>th</sup>, at about the same time, a second Monarch flew over the garden, not far from the first observation. This individual could not be captured and disappeared in a north-westerly direction. The caged ♀ absorbed only the water sprinkled on top of the cage, and ignored the diluted honey and the set flowers and died four days later.

### Where did these two Monarch butterflies come from?

One might wonder about the circumstances surrounding the Monarchs in Callas. Were they migrants, or were they reared and released?

The second possibility is exemplified by the fact that the releasing of reared Monarch butterflies appears to occur regularly these days, especially at weddings (JOHN et al., 2015). The eggs can be bought over the internet. The excellent condition of the captured ♀ strongly argued against long-distance migration from North America.

In Europe, a few small populations are known from Portugal and Spain (OBREGÓN et al., 2015; PALMA et al., 2023). In these locations, *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* (Asclepiadaceae) is used as host-plant. This plant is also found along the Mediterranean coast in southern France and could serve as a host-plant. In the United States, *D. plexippus* (L.) has also been observed to use *Vincetoxicum nigrum* (Asclepiadaceae) as a host-plant (CASAGRANDE et al., 2007). This plant is native to southern Europe, and grows on the Mediterranean coast of southern France, where it could be used as a host-plant (John et al., 2015). Indeed, the weather conditions were very favourable for migration from nearby coasts. For several weeks, it was around 30 °C with a light south-westerly breeze.

To assess whether this was migration of the Monarch from other southern European regions, more observations from this summer will be needed. Alternatively, we hope to hear from persons who reared and released this species in the neighbourhood of our residence in Callas (Var) where the dead Monarch butterfly is preserved (GPS coordinates: 43.590462° - 6.540895°).

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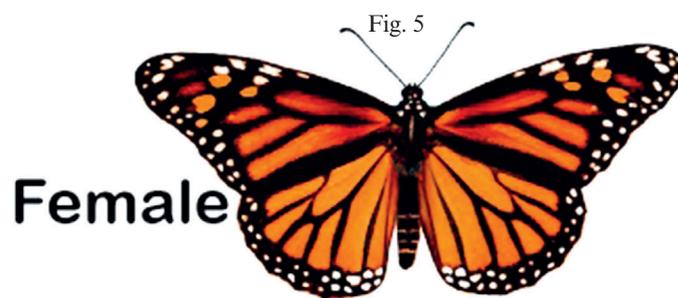
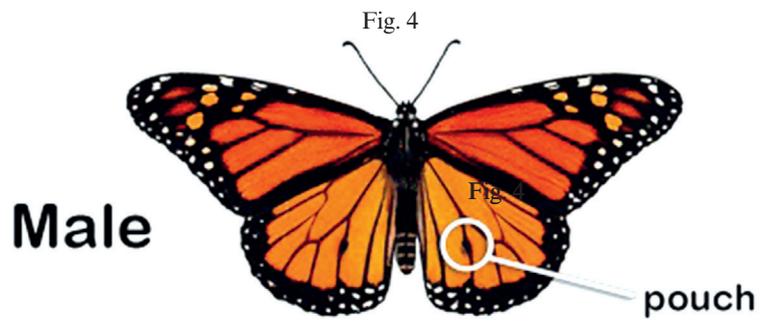
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Fig. 1, 2: *Danaus plexippus* ♀ captured on 5.VI.2025 in Callas (Var, France).



Fig. 3: *Danaus plexippus* ♂ with black spots on vein M1 with androconial scales that produce pheromones (Photo: August 1992, Algonquin Provincial Park, Canada).



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