

Butterflies flutter by: Jerseyville East students become citizen scientists

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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JERSEYVILLE - The efforts of one Jerseyville classroom have been noticed all the way in **Mexico**.

Emily DeSherlia, a second-grade teacher at **Jerseyville East**, has been raising monarch butterflies from caterpillars through cocoons, and into butterflies for a decade. She was

inspired by her aunt, and fellow teacher, **Marsha Krueger**, who has been doing the program in her second-grade classroom at **Holy Ghost** school in Jerseyville. **DeSherlia** also tags her butterflies and tracks their migrations from Jerseyville to various monarch sanctuaries in Mexico. This year, **DeSherlia** discovered one of her classroom's monarchs was found in Mexico.

"One of them was spotted in Mexico 2,000 miles away," **DeSherlia** said. "It's neat to show the kids it works."

DeSherlia said she has been collecting monarch caterpillars from milkweed plants late in the summer to bring into her classroom. Milkweed is the only plant larval monarchs can eat. It is also a nuisance to farmers across the area, and is often decimated by pesticides. This results in a decrease of the monarch's population. **DeSherlia** also said a severe storm in the early 2000s resulted in the deaths of millions of monarchs in Mexico.

While the current plight of the monarch butterflies is not the focal point of **DeSherlia** efforts, science is. By tagging the monarchs in her classroom and following their migrations, **DeSherlia** and her students assist researchers in preserving and tracking the North American monarch population.

"I talk to my students about how they are citizen scientists helping researchers and scientists study monarch migration," **DeSherlia** said in an email. "Without citizen scientists, there wouldn't be as much data on such a large scale."

Before being tagged as adult butterflies, the students in **DeSherlia's** classroom are able to watch the entire life cycle of the butterfly from its humble beginnings as a yellow, black and white striped caterpillar.

"It's fun to watch the life cycle instead of just reading about it," **DeSherlia** said. "We've been lucky enough that most years, my students will see a caterpillar actually transforming into a chrysalis, which only takes a few minutes after it's been hanging for many hours, or see a butterfly within moments of emerging from the chrysalis when the wings are still very very small. The kids keep a close eye on the containers when they know a change of some kind is coming."

DeSherlia and her students tag about 25 butterflies a year, using tags from a monarch sanctuary. These tags can be placed gently on the butterflies' wings, and do not interfere with their flight. **DeSherlia** said discovering one of her students' butterflies in Mexico is great, but said she is sure others have made it through their journeys as well. She was happy she was lucky enough to find one made it for sure.

Her students continue to learn about butterflies after the tagging. **DeSherlia** said her students were able to take a virtual trip to a monarch sanctuary as part of the **Learn Around the World** program last Tuesday.



