

Native Plants And Butterflies

by Eve Hannahs

Fall is the season for butterfly watching.

The bright orange-and-black Monarch is one of our best-known butterflies, famous for its fall migration. The western populations winter on the coast of California where they can be seen by the countless thousands roosting on trees and shrubs. The eastern populations migrate across the Gulf of Mexico, stopping at coastal Panhandle areas for resting and feeding in early to mid-October. Small populations winter in South Florida where hatchings are found on the introduced tropical milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*.

In spring, when their biological time clock sounds the alert,

Monarchs fly northward, depositing their eggs on the orange butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, and other asclepias species. The Monarch relative, the Queen butterfly, chooses the same plants. Because of poisonous properties in milkweeds eaten in the larval stage, the butterflies enjoy protection from some predators.

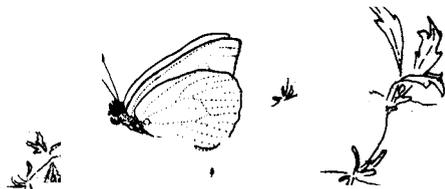
But, long before the Monarch arrives in Florida, other species have preceded them. The close observer may find many species feeding in

disturbed areas on nectar-rich flowers: bidens, goldenrod, garberia, and liatris are prime attractors.

Some of the more obvious butterflies to look for are the early Great Southern White with fluorescent turquoise tips on the antennae. They are on their way to salt marshes where grows *Batis maritima*, or salt wort, for their larval foods.

Before the Whites have completed their journey, streams of large Cloudless Sulphurs join the tag-end of their flight. Others that are commonly seen are Buckeyes, Red Admirals, Zebra Longwings, Painted Ladies, Hairstreaks, Gulf Fritillaries, and Skippers.

Take to the back roads for butterfly watching. Now is the time.



Great Southern White butterflies, nectaring on *Eryngium balwinii*

by Marcy Bartlett