



Montreal's Monarch fields  
must be preserved

## Description

# Monarchs come to feed and breed among abundant milkweed in threatened Technoparc meadow

By **Patrick Barnard** and **Richard Swift**

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Monarch butterflies are endangered. Money cannot be made to flutter on wings nor fulfil the role of the Monarch

– Chief Ross Montour, Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke

The Montreal birding group **Technoparc Oiseaux** and its founder **Joël Coutu** have brought a precious jewel to light north of Montréal-Trudeau International airport: a marvellous web of marsh, forest, streams and fields hidden away in the borough of Saint-Laurent and the City of Dorval. This integrated ecosystem is known as “the **Technoparc Wetlands**” and birding enthusiasts, along with the non-partisan environmental group **Green Coalition**, are fighting to save the area that has become the number #1 birding site on Montreal Island.

Much of the 200-hectare zone is owned by the federal government of Canada, and an important section consists of the “**Monarch fields**” where Monarch butterflies come to feed and breed among abundant milkweed. At the end of 2020, the Green Coalition received federal assurances that “no development” would take place on these federally-owned lands. However, the office of **Francis Scarpaleggia**, M.P. for Lac-Saint-Louis, has just now informed the Green Coalition that a private company will be installing a 15,500 square-meter industrial plant, to produce surgical masks, on top of the Monarch fields, effectively destroying them.



Technoparc meadow – Image: Jim Harris

**Chief Ross Montour** from the Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke told a Sierra Club forum on May 18 that he is very disturbed because “we were not approached to consult,” about the wetlands. He added: “This puts city, provincial and federal governments in a bad light. It’s horrible what’s been done in the name of progress, of development.”

We must not forget that in 2019 Montreal was the first major Canadian city to be awarded Gold Status, as “a friend of the Monarch,” as a city committed “to restoring and protecting the Monarch habitats all along their migration corridor and encouraging its citizens to participate in this preservation work.”

Why care about the Monarch butterfly? Because it is a litmus test of how we humans treat or mistreat the natural world. Because this extraordinary butterfly species is endangered – in Mexico and here, weakened by us, by our government and our actions. Both in the Mexican Monarch refuge and Montreal’s Technoparc, it is the destruction of species habitat that is the main villain in this story of loss and spoliation.

The brilliantly coloured Monarch has declined by about 90 percent since the 1990s and its eastern migratory route takes it from the high mountains of central Mexico all the way up to Canada, and to this city.

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One of us, **Richard Swift**, went to the **Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve** in Michoacán state and worked his way up a mountainous path to find a majestic site: alpine Oyamel fir trees so covered in Monarchs that no vegetation could be seen beneath. Even though the individuals in each “migratory generation,” travelling hundreds



or thousands of miles, have never before in their lives made their long journey, they nonetheless follow an internal “compass” that points them in the right direction.



Monarch butterfly on Thistle – Image: Ilana Block

The migratory pattern of the Monarchs gives them a far-flung habitat system under pressure at almost every point. Down in Michoacán illegal logging and avocado plantations are encroaching on the Reserve despite it being a UNESCO Heritage site. In 2020 a Reserve manager and vocal Monarch advocate, [Homero Gómez González](#), was found strangled and his body stuffed down a well.

In the U.S. and Canada, farmers have little use for the “unproductive” milkweed essential for Monarch reproduction, and habitat is threatened by agro-chemicals, plus climate change. As the living area for these endangered butterflies becomes ever more crucial, the sensitivity of all levels of government to protect it has never been more important.

**Katherine Collin**, speaking for the 3,800 members of Technoparc Oiseaux, says that “it is deeply disturbing that the federal government, in conjunction with the City of Dorval, has given its blessing to the fragmentation and destruction of Monarch Fields.” And she forcefully comments that “the idea that the federal government would tacitly contribute to habitat loss of the Monarch butterfly, the emblem of endangered species in North America, is simply unacceptable.”

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**Katherine Collin, Technoparc Oiseaux**

Monarchs live in a wide range of habitats, each of them requiring the best protection. As Chief Ross Montour puts it, “authorities must go above and beyond – the environment demands it.”



Chief Montour is talking about territory that is completely owned by the federal government. Canada bears full responsibility here. What is demanded is straightforward: the Monarch Fields in Montreal's Technoparc wetlands must be preserved.

Feature image: [Kathy Servian on Unsplash](#)

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