

Monarch Butterflies Star in Documentary and Novel

If you can tear yourself away from the garden this Spring, here are a book and a film you might want to take in. Both focus on monarch butterflies and the challenges of climate change. For those of us who are not scientists by training, this film and book provide easy access to understanding some of the issues related to the remarkable story of the longest insect migration. For the science-oriented, you will find both of interest.



Flight of the Butterflies at the Tech Museum IMAX Dome Theater, 45 min.
<http://www.flightofthebutterflies.com/>; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1290>

This film tells the amazing story of Dr. Fred Urquart who spent his life tracking the migration of monarch butterflies from Toronto to Mexico. It takes multiple generations of butterflies to make the almost year-long round trip migration. Dr. Urquart and his wife engaged a cadre of citizen scientists and invented a method of tagging the butterflies to enable tracking. Eventually in 2011 and 2012, they found millions of butterflies overwintering on a few mountaintops about 120 miles from Mexico City. Needless to say, the IMAX images are huge and the close-up pictures of monarchs in various developmental phases are remarkable—clear focus and great detail. For example, the film shows what is going on inside the pupa while the butterfly is forming. The site in Mexico is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This film is well worth seeing and appropriate and interesting for viewers of all ages.

The film hints at the issues at the heart of Barbara Kingsolver's new book:

Flight Behavior by Barbara Kingsolver

Flight Behavior is fiction, based on solid scientific research. As I understand it, Barbara Kingsolver's first career was as a biologist. This is the story of an Appalachian family that discovers monarchs overwintering on their mountaintop. It deals thoughtfully with the conflicts between caring responsibly for the environment, residents' financial pressures, as well as the main character's evolution of understanding what is going on in her back yard. A compelling character, Dellarobia, is struck by the exquisite beauty of the monarchs, and comes to understand, with the reader, that the changing climate has thrown the monarchs off course. The temperature and moisture needs of the butterflies are very specific, as noted in *Flight of the Butterflies*. Their survival is challenged in the new location.

The book is well worth reading: informative, compelling characters, beautiful language. As Elinor Lipman writes in her November 2013 NYT review, "*Flight Behavior* is ambitious in its scope, marrying Dellarobia's wisenheimer worldview with danger of the huge, immutable kind."

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/19/books/barbara-kingsolvers-flight-behavior.html?_r=0

I hope you find time to enjoy both. Connie Cavanaugh

Stanford Exhibit--Revisiting the South: Richard Misrach's Cancer Alley

The Cantor Arts Center is showing a stunning photographic exhibit: "*Revisiting the South: Richard Misrach's Cancer Alley*," through 16 June 2013. Nineteen lyrically magnificent, large-scale color photographs engage and challenge viewers with environmental, political, and social concerns. In focusing on the delicate state of the Mississippi River corridor from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, the exhibit shows the far-reaching ecological damage surrounding America's petrochemical industry, and the larger costs of our modern world at the dawn of the 21st century. http://museum.stanford.edu/news_room/misrach.html

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