

by Elizabeth Watson Chaney

## GENEVIEVE LEROUX

### ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

**Genevieve Leroux, a 15-year-old high school student,** has been working to protect the monarch butterfly since she first learned of its endangered status when she was 9. Genevieve convinced her home city's mayor to take the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge. She germinated thousands of milkweed seeds and teamed up with the city biologist of San Luis Obispo, California, to plant them in public areas in her hometown. With her parents' permission, she also started a pollinator garden, which eventually attracted enough monarchs that a professor at California Polytechnic Institute visited to teach her how to tag, observe, and record data on individual butterflies.



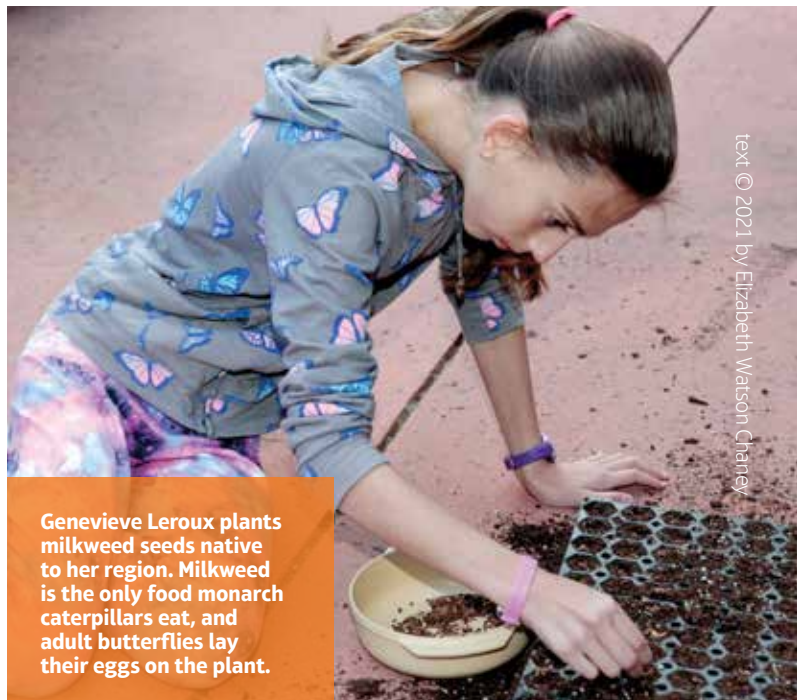
Genevieve also started her own project called Milkweed for Monarchs, an initiative she manages through Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots website. She has met Goodall, her hero, twice. Genevieve now lives in Quebec, Canada, where her focus has shifted the western migratory monarch to the eastern migratory monarch.

**HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME AWARE THAT MONARCHS WERE ENDANGERED, AND WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO ACTIVELY WORK ON THE PROBLEM?**

I learned about the monarch's population decline when I was in third grade, after reading about it in *Ranger Rick* magazine. I was already familiar with these beautiful creatures, living in California, so I wanted to do whatever I could to help.

**HOW CAN WE HELP MONARCHS SURVIVE?**

It's really helpful to grow native milkweed and support the monarch butterflies along their migration with pollinator gardens. Stopping the use of pesticides and herbicides is also a great way to help the monarchs because if the poisons get into the nectar or onto the milkweed, they will ingest it and die. Also, revising mowing practices on highway medians so the butterflies can stop during migration.



Genevieve Leroux plants milkweed seeds native to her region. Milkweed is the only food monarch caterpillars eat, and adult butterflies lay their eggs on the plant.

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**HOW MANY BUTTERFLIES HAVE YOU TAGGED OVER THE YEARS, AND HAS THE INFORMATION GATHERED THROUGH THE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECTS YOU'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN SHOWN PROMISING RESULTS?**

I've tagged 126 butterflies so far. Most of the results we've received have been bad news, but it helps us figure out what we need to focus on in the future. Back in California, the citizen science projects I was involved in showed that the population numbers are dropping to the point where the western migratory monarch is facing a quasi-extinction.

Here in Canada, I've been continuing to tag and collect data on the butterflies like I did in California, and the numbers are looking better. I've also started helping with a new citizen science project called the M3 Monarch Migration study. We are testing an enlarged prototype of the world's tiniest computer that will eventually be able to be attached to the monarchs' bodies as they fly to Mexico, monitoring their surroundings and tracking their route. Once scientists know the exact routes the butterflies take, they will know more about where and how they can help the monarch butterflies survive their long migration.



Genevieve has twice met her hero, Jane Goodall, the iconic scientist and conservationist.



**HOW HAS JANE GOODALL INSPIRED YOU?**

Jane Goodall has always been an inspiration for me. Her passion for science



## WHAT PLANTS ARE BEST FOR MY YARD?

You can learn more about which pollinator-friendly plants are best for your region from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Go to [xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/pollinator-friendly-plant-lists](https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/pollinator-friendly-plant-lists).



and conservation is incredible. Whenever I give presentations about monarch butterfly conservation, I try to use Dr. Jane's philosophy: don't just tell them what they're doing wrong, show them what they could be doing right.

### CAN YOU SHARE A BIT ABOUT THE PROJECT YOU'RE CURRENTLY WORKING ON AT JANE GOODALL'S REQUEST?

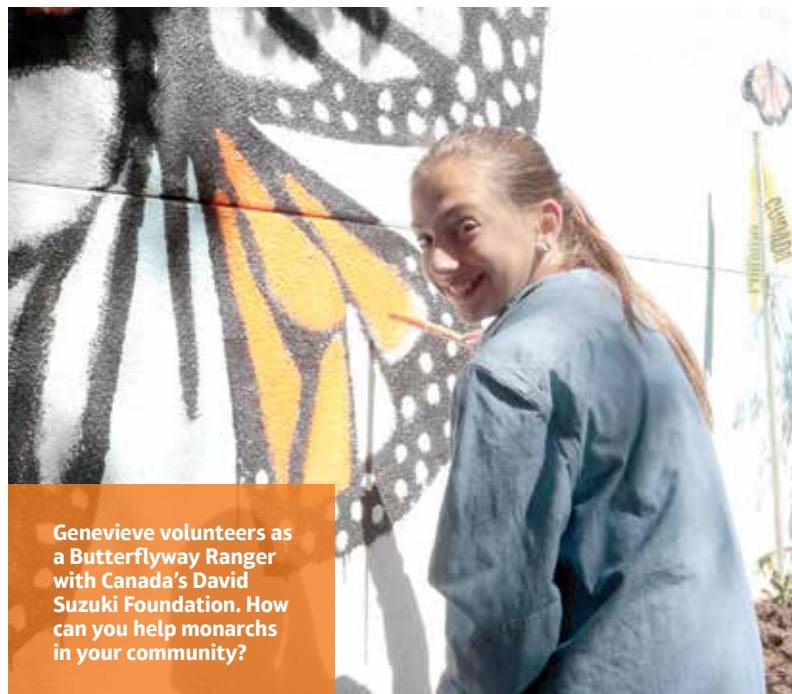
What I'm trying to do is link all the Jane Goodall Roots and Shoots projects that are focused on monarch butterfly/pollinator conservation in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. We hope to create a network of projects along the migration path of the monarch butterfly so that passionate kids and change makers across the continent can share ideas and help each other with their conservation efforts. We hope by linking these

projects together, kids from all three countries will be able to work together to help save this amazing butterfly from extinction.

### IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE COOLEST THING ABOUT BUTTERFLIES?

Every time I think about it, the monarch's 3,000-plus-mile (7,000-km) journey from Canada to Mexico never ceases to amaze me. I think it's crazy that a tiny insect is able to make it so far in only a few months.

**Elizabeth Watson Chaney** writes from her home in North Carolina, where she recently started a butterfly garden.



Genevieve volunteers as a Butterflyway Ranger with Canada's David Suzuki Foundation. How can you help monarchs in your community?