

MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55105

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Subject: A MONARCH at ORDWAY.

Does the Monarch butterfly know anything about nautical methods of navigation? We know it is one of the few insects which carries out an annual migration and well before the year's end will be congregating in the trees at Pacific Grove and elsewhere.

I watched recently while they were feeding amongst the flowering forbs in the meadow. It was the most colorful season of the year and the scene on the meadow was bright with the autumn prairie flowers whose colors were accentuated by the tawny black-veined sprites making their ways from one flower to another. It was a typical autumn day and one on which a very stiff wind developed - not exactly of gale proportions but certainly not less than 20 mph and gusting.

My attention became focussed on a particular lepidopteron feeding near the building. This delicate-appearing bit of silky beauty had finished its foraging on one Goldenrod and as it released its hold on the flowerhead it was carried backwards by the onrushing winds. For a breath-taking moment of perhaps forty seconds it hung there, the black veinings of its striking wing pattern making a miniature stained-glass smudge on the blue autumn sky - but it trimmed ship, its wings remaining fixed in a nearly 90° dihedral as it proceeded to luff up toward the wind, at the same time proceeding slowly to its port, finally grasping the floral nectarfont of an Aster to continue its foraging. In all it covered about 15 meters sidelong and about one or two meters forward, i.e. into the direction from which the wind was blowing (southwest); the whole process required about two minutes.

I began to feel a little more comprehension of and respect for the awesome annual migration performed by this most beautiful of creatures.



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