

# Butterflies of the Jarrett Prairie Preserve



Great Spangled Fritillary on Prairie Dogbane



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The Monarch butterfly has received a lot of attention over the last few years and for good reason. The overall population of this once very common butterfly has declined sharply in a relatively short time. Many efforts are underway to help protect and increase the Monarch population including planting native milkweeds and pollinator plots of wildflowers. The Monarch is a migratory butterfly and this makes their protection a great challenge as they need good habitat available to them all along their long journey from their wintering grounds in Mexico to their summer homes in the Midwest and other regions of the country. The Monarch, however, is only one of many butterflies that inhabit our preserves and the Jarrett Prairie Nature Preserve in particular.

Some of the other species of butterflies are still pretty common and can be found along roadsides, around our homes, and in some open fields, such as Red Admirals, Tiger Swallowtails, and American Painted Ladies. Although, some common butterflies seem to be in decline in many

areas as suitable habitat continues to shrink or degrade. Other species are already uncommon and becoming even more rare and tend to be found only at high quality natural areas like the Jarrett Prairie Preserve and other managed, protected preserves. Many of these butterfly species are called “remnant dependent” or “remnant associated” species. This means they are found almost exclusively in natural area remnants, areas where the original native vegetation occurs, like the Jarrett Prairie. These butterflies tend to be found only in these remnants because they lay their eggs on, the larva feed on, or they nectar on a rare prairie plant found only in these remnants.

In 2015, Dr. Wayne Schennum conducted several site surveys at the Jarrett Prairie identifying all butterflies we came across but, in particular, in search of a number of these rare remnant dependent or associated species. A few were found, many were not. He has found that many of the species known to be remnant dependent are probably even

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rarer than we had thought. Most of the high quality prairies he visited in our area were similar to our Jarrett Prairie; they contained a few of these rare butterflies but not most. A few very nice species that we did find on our preserve include the Meadow Fritillary and the Coral Hairstreak. These are two species associated with high quality prairies but can sometimes be found in other areas.

One species we hoped to find on those surveys was the Regal Fritillary (pictured below). This remnant dependent species needs to have prairie violets for the larva to feed on. The Jarrett Prairie has these rare violets in several areas and the Regal Fritillary was known from the preserve in the early 1990s but we did not find any during our surveys. This doesn't mean they aren't still present here, as the Jarrett Prairie is a fairly large preserve and we certainly weren't able to cover all of it. We hold out hope.



By protecting land in our area and restoring land to the original native plant communities that settlers encountered in the early 1800s, we are increasing the habitat on which all of the butterflies of our region can survive and hopefully flourish. Future steps to help some of the rare prairie species could be to reintroduce them to our preserves from other preserves where they still exist. This could be the case for a rare butterfly like the Regal Fritillary that was once known from the Jarrett Prairie or the Karner Blue, a federally endangered butterfly, that needs Wild Lupine for survival, a plant we now have thousands of in our prairies.

On your next visit to the Jarrett Prairie, be on the lookout for these winged critters and be sure to let us know what you find. You may help us learn of a species we didn't know inhabited our site or you may be the one to track down the Regal Fritillary, not seen for years at the Jarrett Prairie.



## Butterflies most likely to be seen at our preserves:

- Monarch
- Viceroy
- Meadow Fritillary
- Great Spangled Fritillary
- Red Admiral
- American Painted Lady
- Pearl Crescent
- Common Wood Nymph
- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Coral Hairstreak
- Tiger Swallowtail
- Giant Swallowtail

For more information, check out <http://www.illinoisbutterflies.com/butterflies.htm>

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