



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

(Posted Aug. 18, 2015) One billion of them once floated gently through the sky, but now the monarch butterfly is a vanishing breed.

INDOT is doing its part to save these gliding beauties, and the Indianapolis Zoo has taken notice. The zoo has devoted a small pollinator garden exhibit that contains plants used by INDOT in our [Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program](#). The program incorporates native plants and wildflowers into Indiana's roadside landscape to, among other things, enhance plant pollination.



A tawny crescent spot butterfly rests on one of the wildflowers grown from seeds, supplied by INDOT, at the Indianapolis Zoo's garden exhibit.

“The iconic monarch butterfly is slipping into endangered status, and INDOT’s Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program offers a critically important service to butterfly conservation,” said Indianapolis Zoo Horticulturist Mike Stockman. “To help advertise INDOT’s efforts, the zoo has set up a small garden plot with the same wildflowers and plants.”

In 1996, the number of monarchs in North America peaked at 1 billion. Since then, 970 million have vanished, meaning that only 3 percent of the peak total roams the continent today.

The root cause was farmers and homeowners who sprayed herbicides on milkweed plants, which serve as the butterflies’ nursery, food source and home.

INDOT highways – especially north-south routes – are crucial to the survival of monarch butterflies. With their bright orange-and-black wings, these creatures are the only type of butterfly known to make a two-way migration as birds do. Starting in late March, they fly from Mexico to Canada, before they reproduce for the next generation to head back to Mexico by late October.

With the disappearance of milkweed on farms, the best chances for monarchs to travel north-south are parallel to highways that feature native plants in right-of-way to serve as food and pollination sources.

“INDOT’s Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program is the tie that binds,” said Stockman. “We need so-called ‘butterfly corridors’ that highways provide. I think INDOT’s program paves the way for this awesome creature to remain a part of our heritage for future generations to witness and enjoy.”

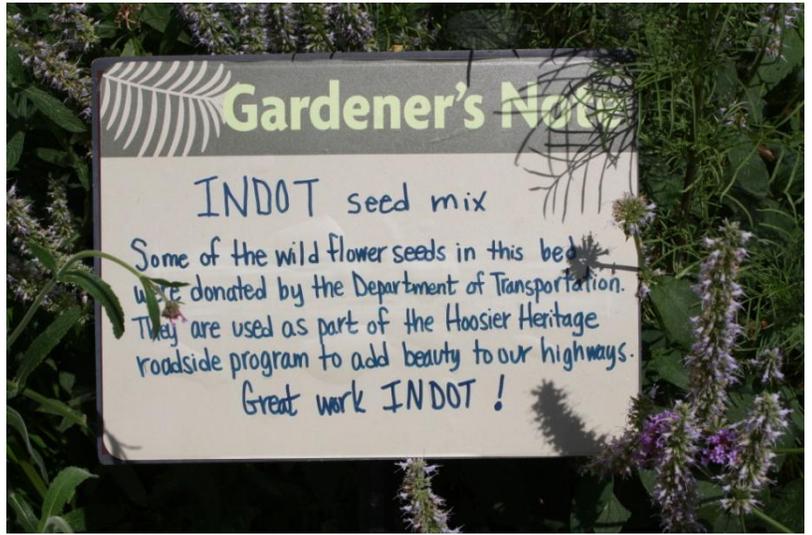
INDOT Roadside Services Coordinator Bill Fielding worked with Stockman starting in January to

supply seeds and program brochures. The display, located at the zoo's White River Gardens, is approximately 5 by 10 feet.

"The display is well-positioned for all garden visitors to see as they are leaving," said Stockman. "In addition, we pass out seed kits and INDOT brochures, telling everyone to visit INDOT's website and take the [INDOT Native Plant and Wildflower Public Survey](#). The more that taxpayers support INDOT's roadside program, the better that we can ensure the survival of monarch butterflies."

Fielding is happy to not only showcase INDOT's program, but also influence generations of visitors at the zoo.

"I think our display at the zoo will help spark conversations between grandparents, parents and kids," said Fielding. "It paints INDOT in a good light, but it also might spark a family to plant milkweed or butterfly bushes to help attract monarchs to save this wonderful creature."



This sign greets those strolling through the grounds at the Indianapolis Zoo, which topped 1.2 million visitors in 2014.

The White House is aligned with Fielding's mentality. This year, the federal government proposed to create a pollinator highway along I-35, which extends from Mexico to Minnesota and follows a main route for the annual monarch butterfly migration.

With the help of INDOT, the Indianapolis Zoo, the federal government and homeowners everywhere, the monarch butterfly just might survive to flutter on by.



Indianapolis Zoo Horticulturist Mike Stockman (left) and INDOT Roadside Heritage Coordinator Bill Fielding are responsible for the new pollinator garden exhibit that showcases the native plants and wildflowers used in INDOT's Hoosier Roadside Heritage Program.