

Seeing Fewer Butterflies? Blame Extreme Weather



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Have you noticed fewer butterflies floating this year? Researchers in the UK think they know the culprit for the population decline: extreme weather conditions.

It's not exactly new news that climate change has an impact on butterflies. In the past, Care2 has detailed the kind of danger global warming poses to the beautiful insects:

- [Climate Change Is Pushing British Butterflies to the Brink](#)
- [Climate Change Hurts Butterflies, Too](#)
- [How Climate Change Affects the Monarch Butterfly, and What We Can Do About It](#)

That research focuses on the long-term effects that climate change has on butterflies, however. The recently published research out of the University of East Anglia takes a different approach, checking to see how extreme weather conditions – a direct consequence of climate change – can more immediately impact the butterfly's numbers.

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Indeed, the researchers were able to confirm that extreme weather conditions like heavy rainstorms, heat waves and droughts had an impact on butterflies. For example, lots of precipitation harmed a butterfly's chance of survival while still in the cocoon.

Even more detrimental is heat in the wintertime. Since butterflies typically go away during the cold months – either hibernating, reentering a cocoon or transitioning to a caterpillar, depending on the species and habitat – the cold weather is a signal to stay in this altered form until the climate cooperates.

When a winter gets unseasonably warm, however, it triggers butterflies to return as if it's spring. When cold temperatures return, though, as they typically do during the winter months, the butterflies are vulnerable to freezing.

The researchers are careful to note that not all extreme weather conditions pose a threat to butterflies. Some conditions can actually benefit them. According to their data, increased heat actually improved the survival rate of butterflies in adult butterfly form.

"The study has demonstrated previously unknown sensitivities of our UK butterflies to extreme climatic events, which are becoming more frequent with climate change," said researcher Osgur McDermott-Long.

McDermott-Long stressed the need to research this topic further in order to determine what can be done to help butterflies in light of these variables. Despite the benefits of a warm summer, they suspect that the warm and wet winters will continue to be more costly to butterfly species, meaning that climate change is a net negative for the insect.

While we wait on subsequent studies, if you want to do your part to save the butterflies, the first obvious step is to make lifestyle choices that will reduce your carbon footprint.

Beyond that, Care2 has a list of other suggestions of things you can do to help the butterflies. Climate change might decrease their chance at survival, but let's not give up on them!

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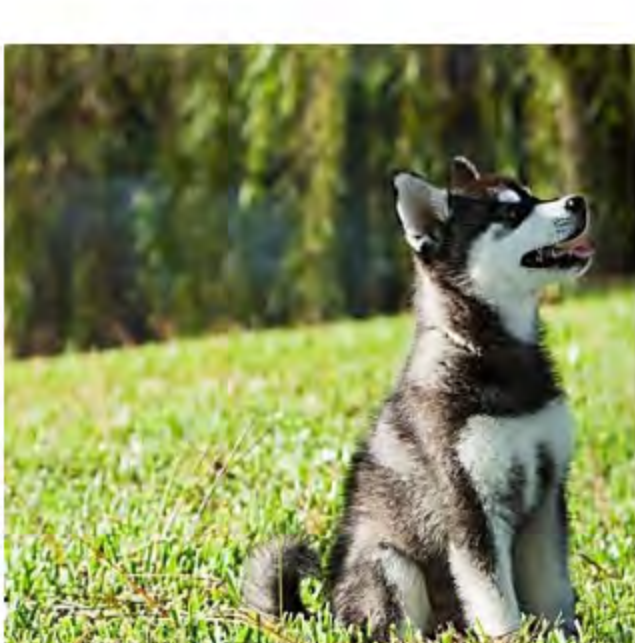
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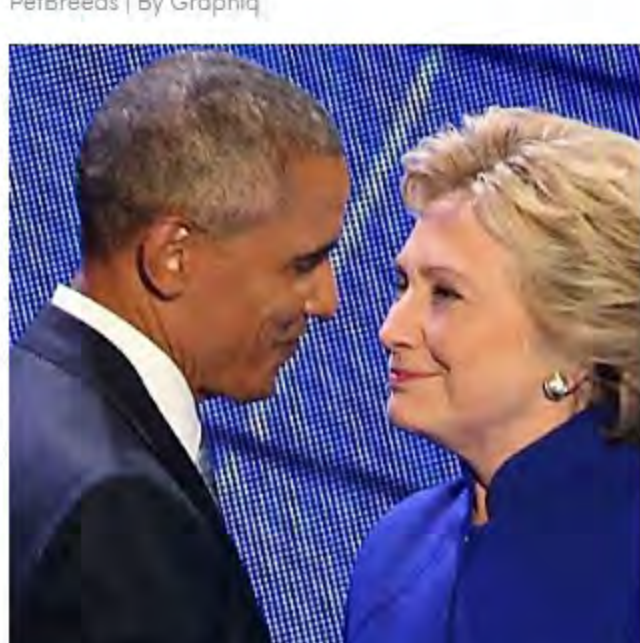
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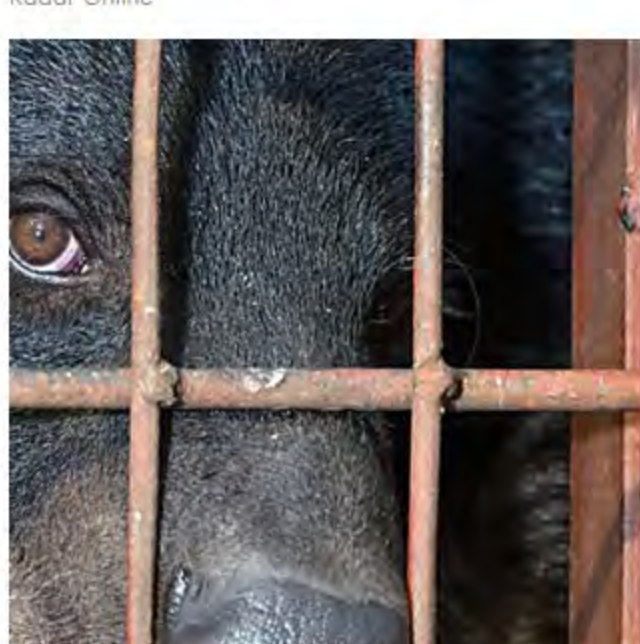
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Not just climate; lack of food plants because of America's barren endless miles of grain farms. Grow some hedgerows, people! Also the pesticides used.

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Janet B. 2 days ago

Thanks

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Carole R. 3 days ago

Such a shame.

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Lucas S. 3 days ago

Add insecticides to the blame game!

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Lindsay Kemp 3 days ago

My buddleia bush would usually have been covered with butterflies, but this year there were very few. Very sad, but I agree with others that there are several causes. Thanks for sharing.

SEND

Lindsay Kemp 3 days ago

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SEND

W. C. 3 days ago

Thank you.

SEND

sandy Gardner 3 days ago

So Sad! Our backyard would be filled with Monarch Butterflies 30 years ago. I've seen 2 in the last five years!

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Anne H. 4 days ago

Interesting and deserves to be noted

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Hent catalina - maria 4 days ago

thanks

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