

LEVELED BOOK • N

The Butterfly Life Cycle

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Written by Torran Anderson

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The Butterfly Life Cycle



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Focus Question

What is the life cycle
of a monarch butterfly?

Words to Know

larva

molting

life cycle

pupa

mate

stages

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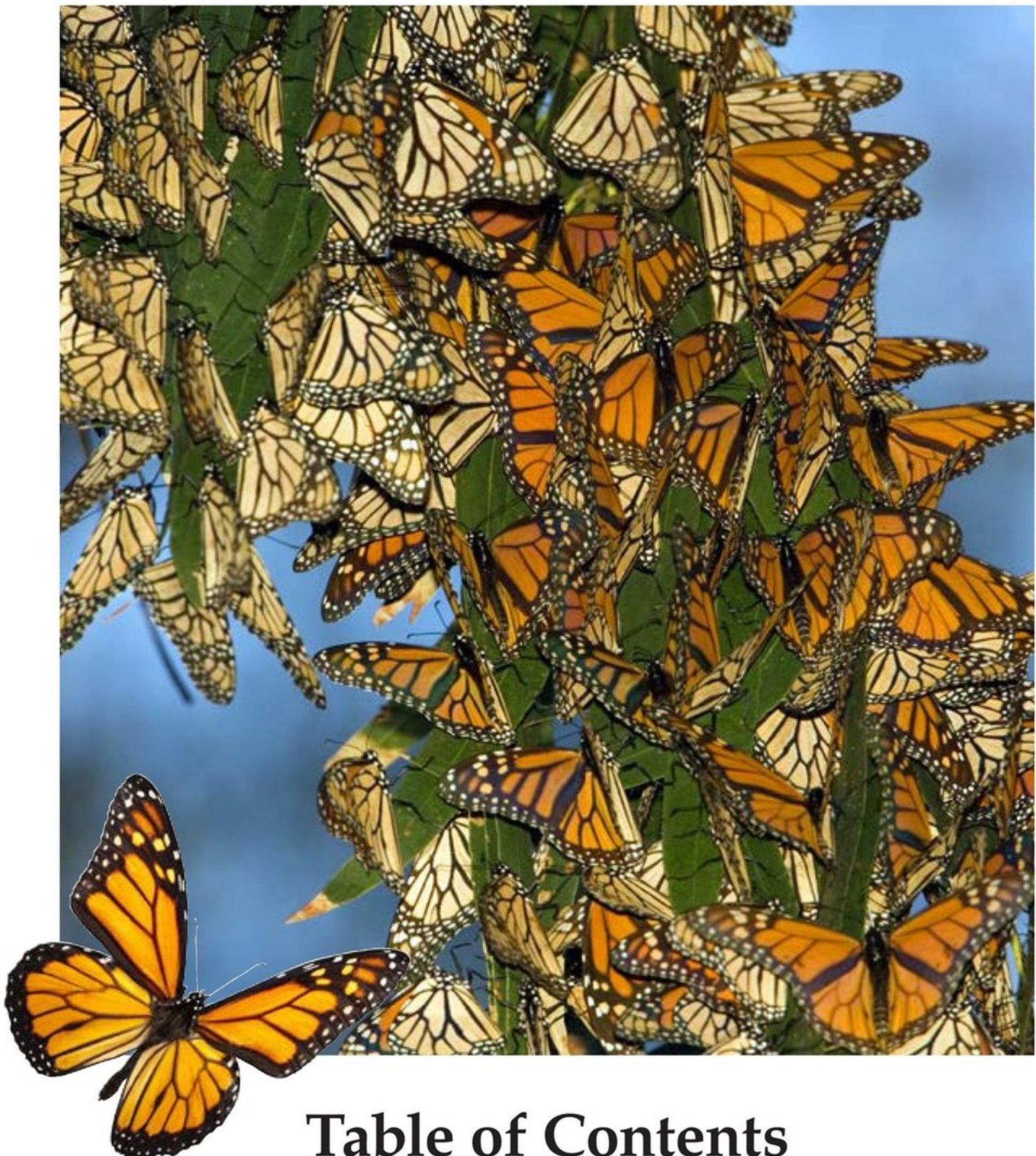
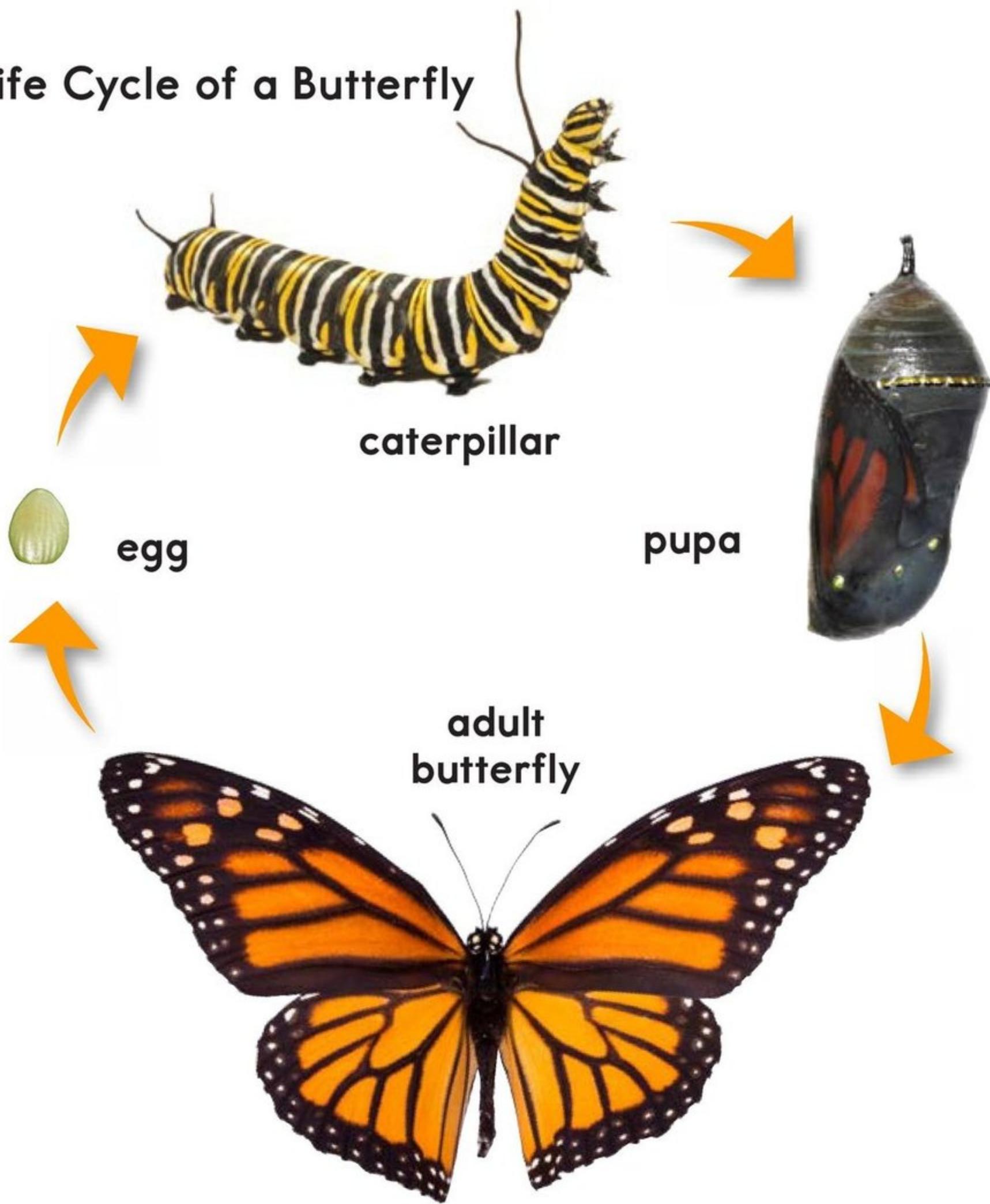


Table of Contents

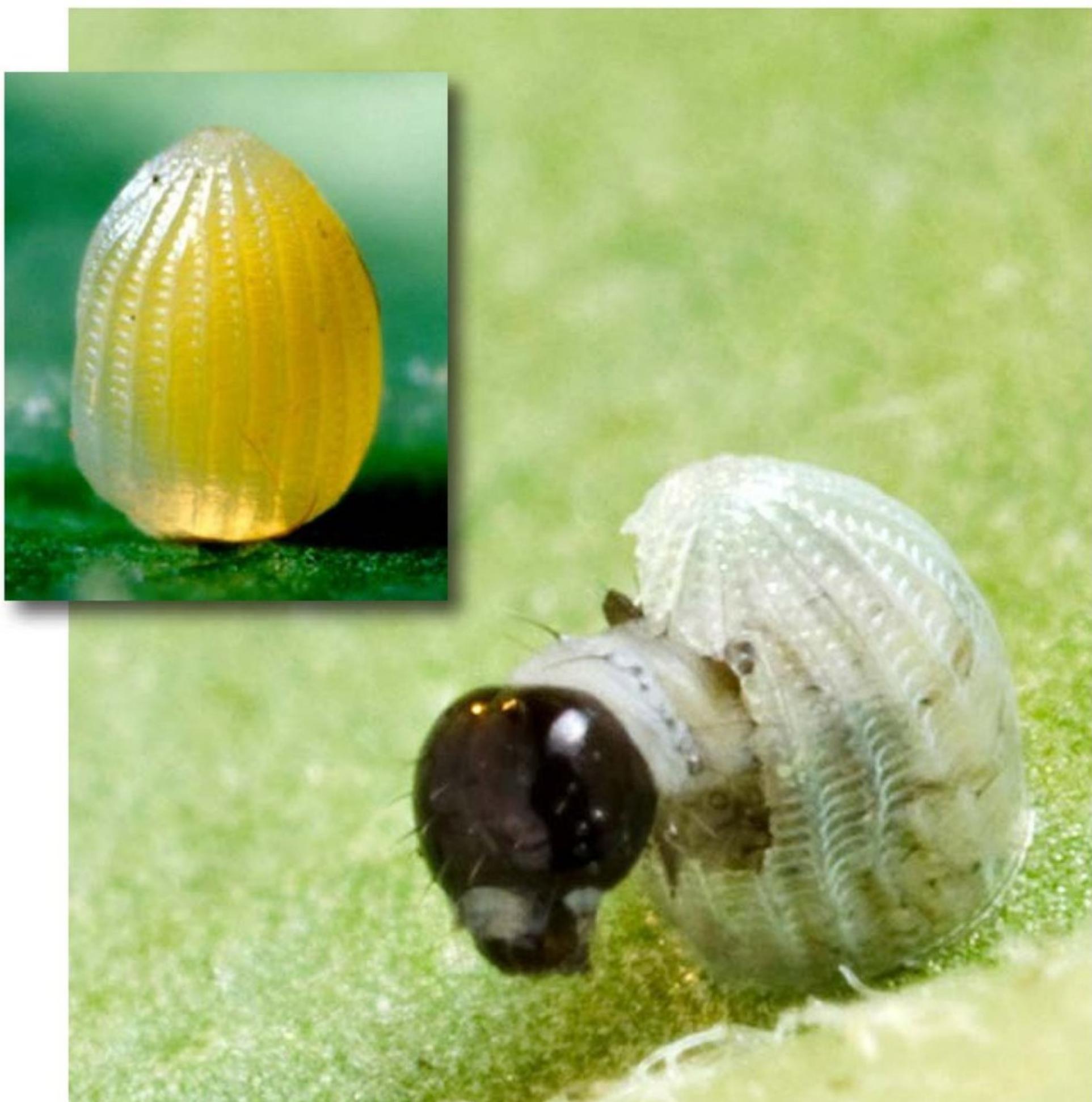
The Life Cycle	4
Egg	5
Pupa	9
Adult Butterfly	11
Glossary	16

Life Cycle of a Butterfly



The Life Cycle

A monarch butterfly has four **stages** in its **life cycle**. They are egg, caterpillar, pupa, and adult. A butterfly's body goes through big changes at each stage in its development.



A young caterpillar hatches from its egg. A female monarch butterfly usually lays only one egg on a leaf.

Egg

A female monarch butterfly lays an oval-shaped egg on the bottom of a leaf. She might lay several hundred eggs in her lifetime. A caterpillar, or **larva**, grows inside the tiny egg. The egg hatches in three to twelve days.



Caterpillars don't drink. They get all the water they need from their food.

The hungry caterpillar eats constantly. It needs a lot of food to grow. First, the caterpillar eats its own eggshell.

It also eats any other eggs on the same leaf. Then, the caterpillar eats the leaf it is on.



The caterpillar grows quickly, but its skin does not grow. The caterpillar's old skin splits and peels away in a process called **molting**. The caterpillar will shed its old skin many times in this stage. The time between each molting is called an *instar*.



The caterpillar puts down sticky silk. The silk keeps the old skin in place while the caterpillar wiggles out of it.





Do You Know?

Monarch caterpillars only eat the leaves of the milkweed plant.

The caterpillar's bright black and yellow colors warn animals that they will get sick if they eat it.

New skin is under the old skin. It is soft at first but soon hardens. The caterpillar sheds its skin four to six times and eats the old skin each time. The caterpillar grows for two to four weeks. The more it eats, the more it can grow after each molting.



The caterpillar's skin splits down its back like a zipper!

Pupa

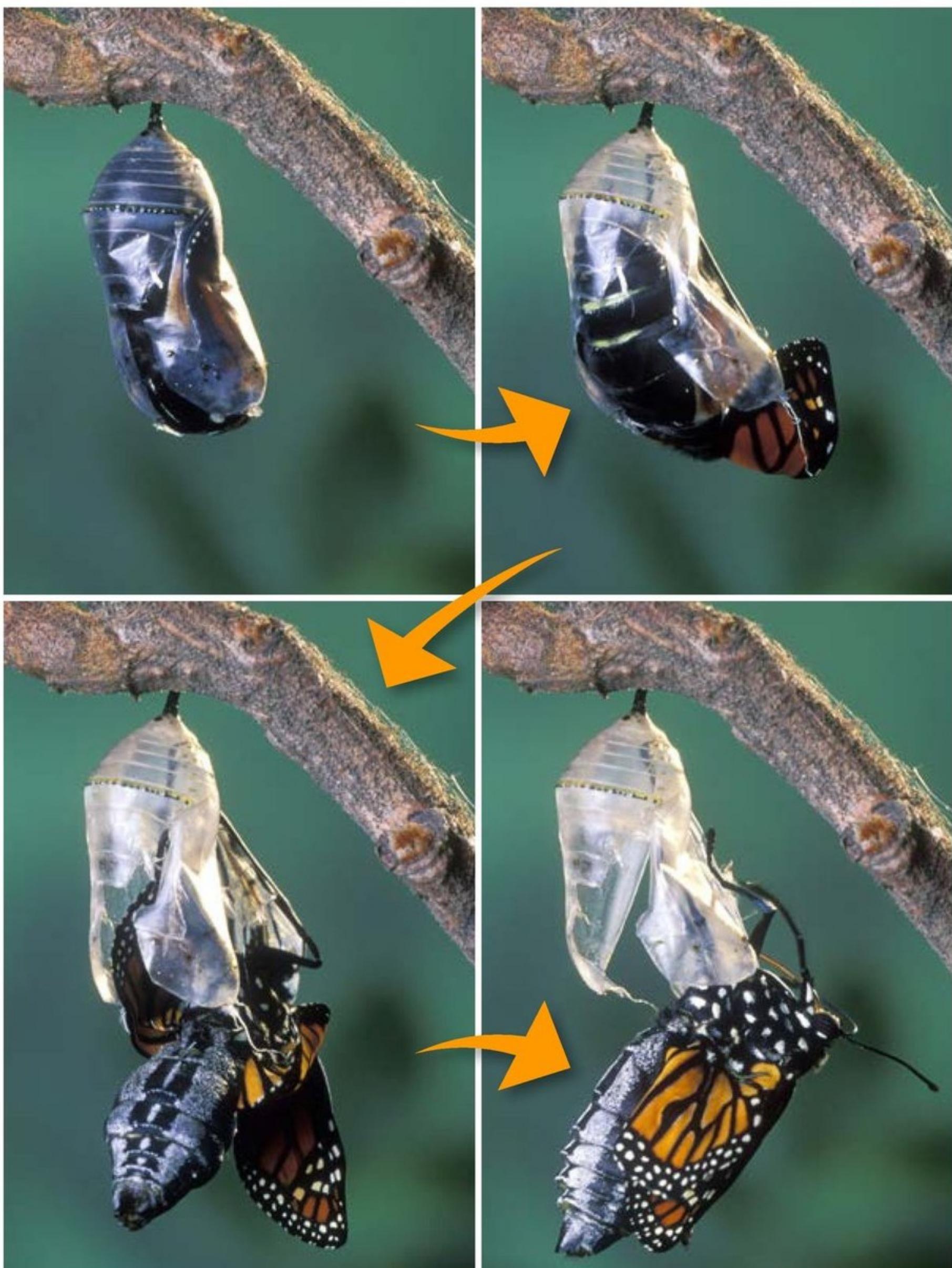
When the caterpillar is grown, it hangs from a branch to prepare for the biggest change of all. It molts one last time. The new skin is bright green and resembles a leaf.



The green color helps the caterpillar hide from other animals.

This green skin hardens around the caterpillar to protect it from predators as it changes inside.

The caterpillar becomes a pupa, or chrysalis (KRI-suh-lus). It will stay inside its shell for one to two weeks. During this time, its body is completely transformed.



The butterfly breathes in air to make its body bigger. Then, the shell splits so the butterfly can climb out.

Adult Butterfly

An adult butterfly emerges from the shell. Its wet wings are folded against its body.



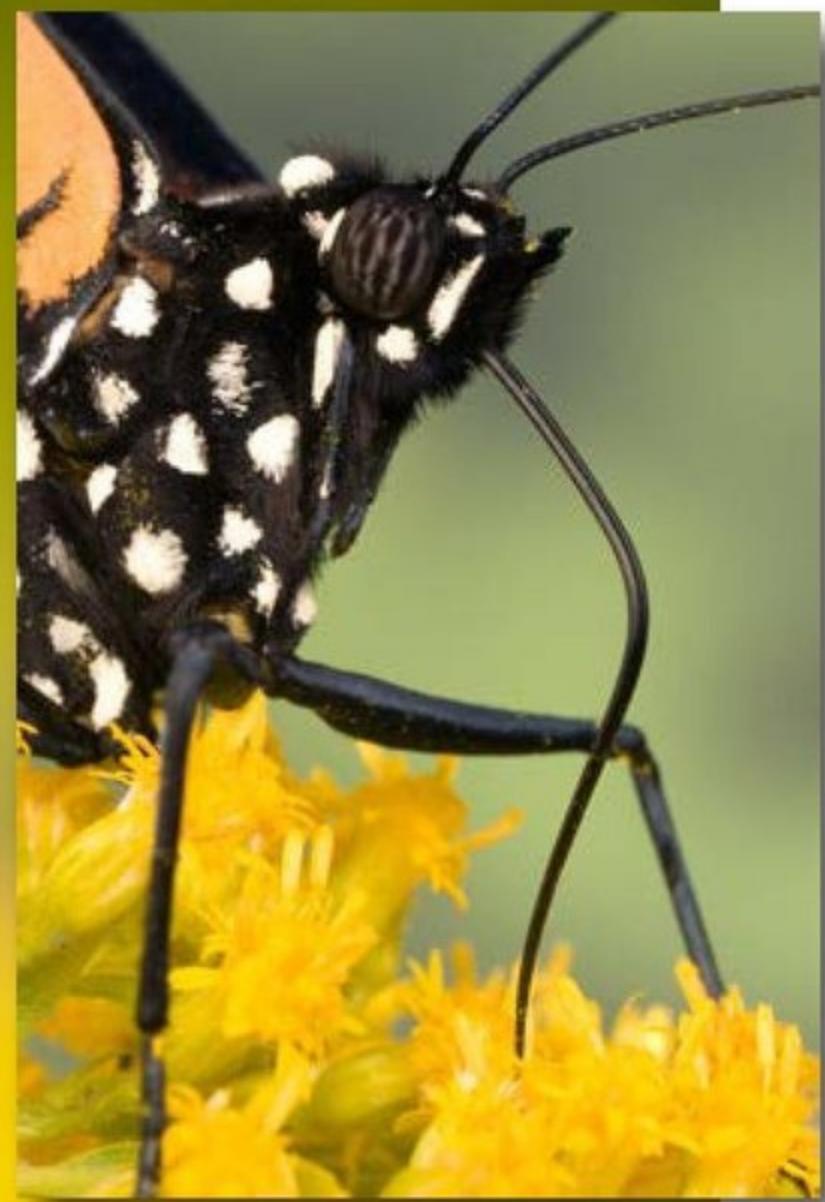
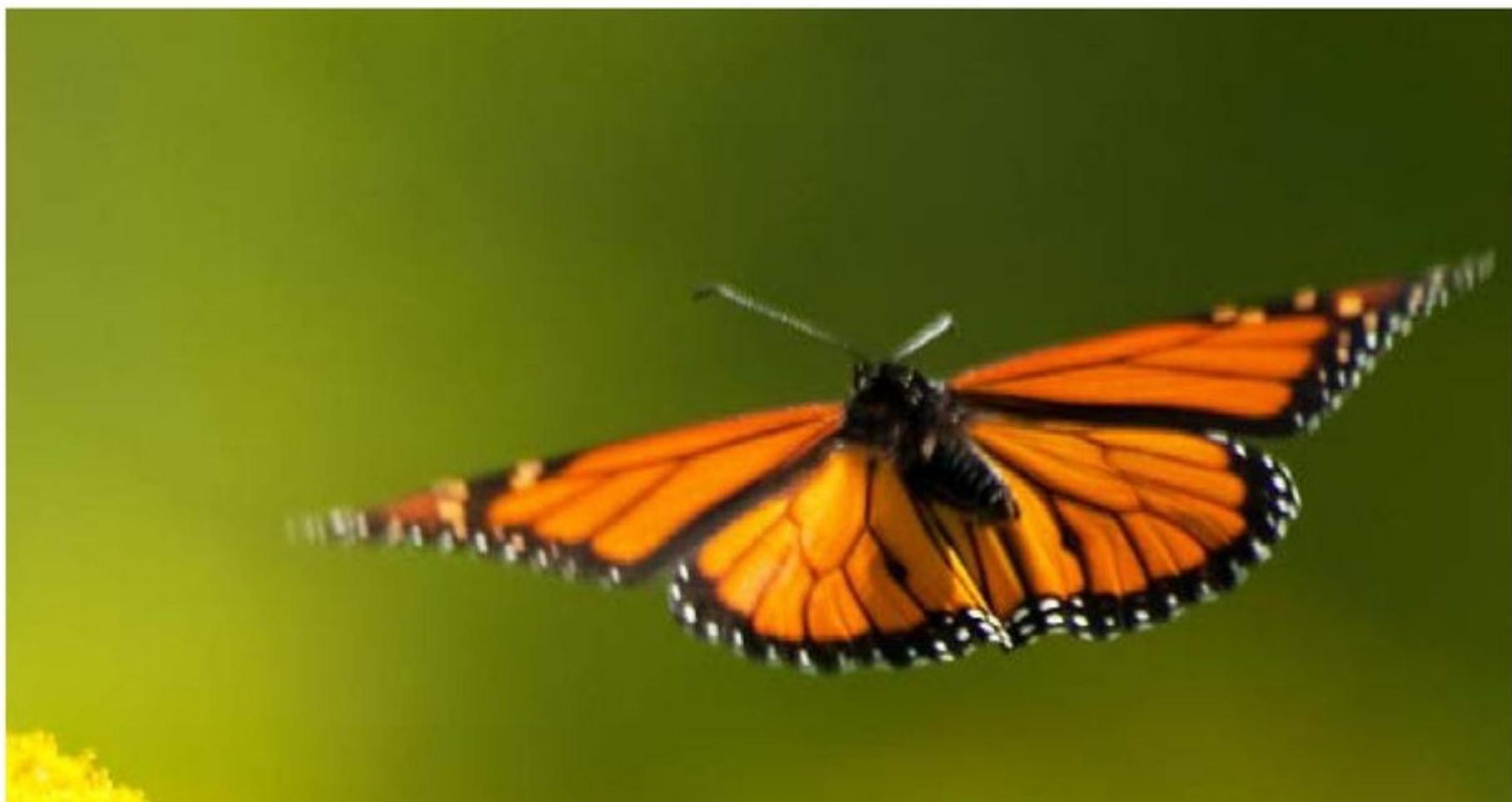
While the butterfly hangs, it pushes blood into its wings.

The butterfly must hang upside down to rest and gain strength, or it will not be able to fly. Blood pumping into the wings causes them to unfold and spread out.



Most monarch butterfly wings are about 4 inches (10 cm) from tip to tip.

The butterfly hangs for several hours. The sun and air dry its delicate wings. A butterfly has two pairs of wings that are covered in scales. The wings in the front often have a slightly different pattern from the pair in the back. When a butterfly rests, it holds its wings up. The colors on the wings are usually similar to each other.



Monarch butterflies drink nectar, a sweet liquid made by plants, with a long tongue shaped like a tube.

Once the butterfly is able to fly, it flies off to eat. Unlike a caterpillar, a butterfly does not eat leaves. Instead it sips nectar from flowers. It also searches for a mate.

Adult butterflies do not grow. They conserve their energy for flying and laying eggs. Females are usually bigger than males and have wider stripes on their wings.

The last monarchs of the season will migrate, or move, to a warmer place in the late summer. These few butterflies will survive the winter until they can return home and find a mate.

A monarch butterfly usually lives for two to six weeks. After she finds a mate, the female lays her eggs and starts the butterfly life cycle all over again.

A female monarch butterfly may lay 400 to 500 eggs in her lifetime!



Glossary

larva (*n.*) the young form of an animal that goes through major body changes before it looks like an adult member of its kind (p. 5)

life cycle (*n.*) the stages of change that a living thing goes through during its life (p. 4)

mate (*n.*) the partner of an animal with which it produces young (p. 14)

molting (*v.*) the act of shedding an outer covering such as skin, hair, feathers, or a shell before replacing it with a new layer (p. 7)

pupa (*n.*) a young insect in the stage between a larva and an adult (p. 4)

stages (*n.*) periods of time in the growth or progress of something, such as insects (p. 4)

The Butterfly Life Cycle

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Connections

Writing and Art

Draw a diagram of the butterfly life cycle. Write about each stage and what happens in between the stages.

Science

Pick two stages of the butterfly life cycle. Compare and contrast them with a partner.



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