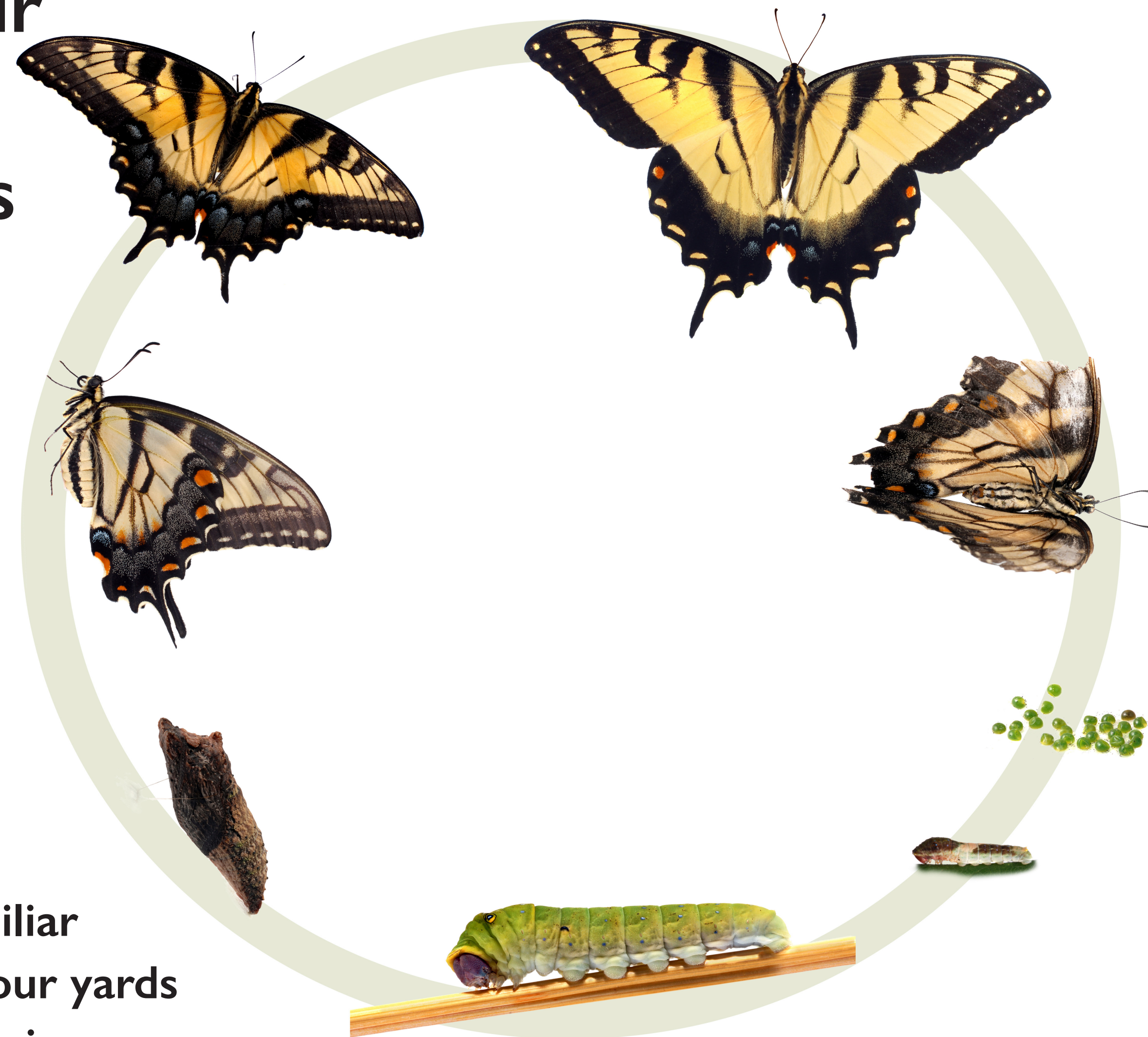


THE LIFE CYCLE OF A BUTTERFLY

Butterflies have four life stages: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis (pupa), and adult butterfly.

The timing and duration of each stage and of the entire life cycle varies across the more than 20,000 species world-wide.

The diagram at right shows one complete life cycle of the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail. It is a familiar friend and can often be seen in our yards and gardens in Southern Wisconsin.



SHUTTERSTOCK

CHANGING FOOD NEEDS



The adult butterflies also have certain habitat needs. They don't eat leaves anymore, but most need liquid nourishment to reproduce. This most often comes from flower nectar.



While the Tiger Swallowtail caterpillar isn't as choosy as many other species about what plants it can eat, it prefers certain trees: cherry, chokecherry and poplar tree leaves are among its favorites.

SURVIVAL CAMOUFLAGE



In the earliest stages, to avoid being eaten, the young caterpillar disguises itself by mimicking bird-droppings.



As it develops, the Tiger Swallowtail caterpillars are among those with eyespots making them "snake mimics" to scare away birds and other predators.

Special thanks to Kate Redmond for use of her Tiger Swallowtail life stages photos.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HABITAT

Some butterflies, like the Tiger Swallowtail, have adjusted to a variety of habitats including our own gardens and yards. For many of our butterflies, including the familiar Monarch, and those species considered rare, not just any garden or field will do at all. Most butterflies (and moths) are adapted to live only in grasslands, savannas, wetlands, forests, or dry sandy barrens, and their caterpillars may eat only a few plant species, sometimes only just one plant!



Photo by Kathy Kirk

These Monarch caterpillars are feeding on milkweed, the only type of plant they eat. Caterpillars often need specific host plants to survive. Milkweed plants are becoming scarce due to agricultural practices, especially herbicides. Landscapes of nothing but "weedless" row crops hold little value for butterflies and other animals.

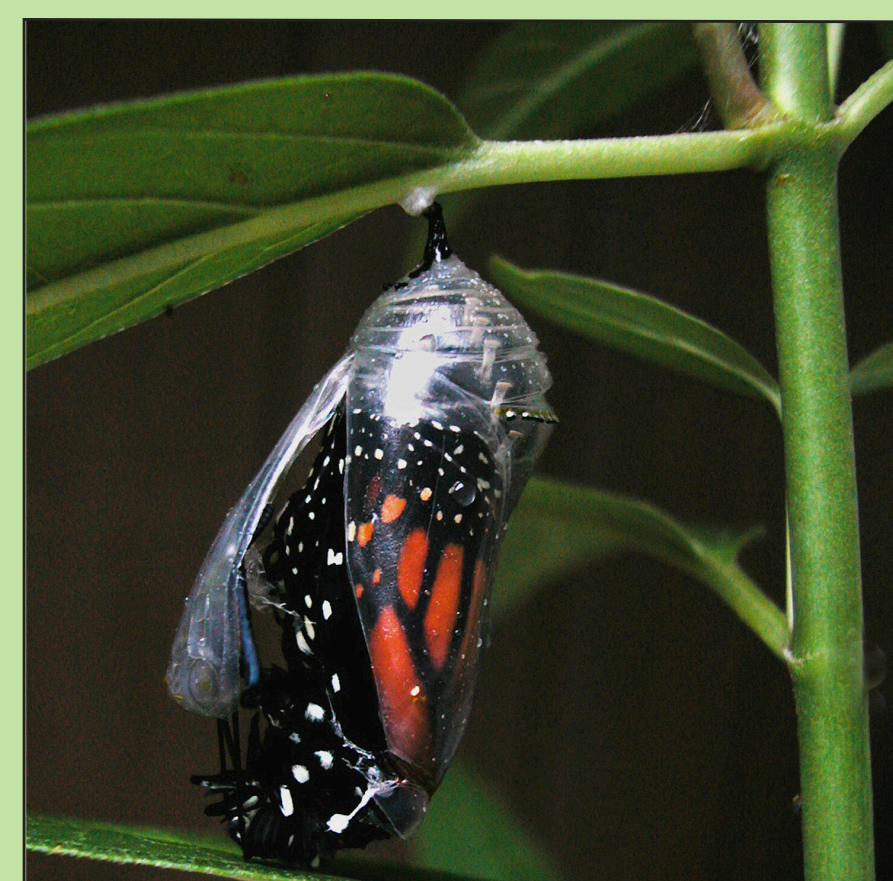


Photo by Kathy Kirk

Monarchs come from a group of tropical butterflies. They visit here and reproduce but when fall arrives the newest adults migrate, unlike most of our resident butterflies that stay and tough it out all winter. These adults need flowers for nectar "fuel" all along the way, but agricultural crops and herbicides have also left far fewer meadow and roadside flowers to sustain them.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Here our Monarchs join with millions of others from the north to overwinter in a very specific forested area in Mexico. This area has suffered from forest cutting, greatly shrinking their wintering habitat.



Photo by Kathy Kirk

Some butterfly species require very specific plants. For example, wild lupine, which produces brilliant purple spikes of color across sandy meadows in many parts of Wisconsin, is the only food plant for three of our most rare butterflies. The egg on this lupine stem was placed there by a female Persius Dusky Wing, a Special Concern butterfly whose females know what their choosy offspring will eat! Said Kathy, "I watched the female ovipositing...I was too excited about the egg to take a picture of the butterfly!"