

**Nymphalidae family**

# Wanderer

*Danaus plexippus plexippus***Also known as:** Monarch, or Milkweed Butterfly**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Common**Flight:** Throughout the year**Wingspan:** m 93 mm; f 92 mm**Mature larva length:** 45 mm

A North American butterfly that immigrated to South Australia in 1874, the Wanderer is an attractive species well worth encouraging into the city. Many home gardens already have specimens of its caterpillar food plants, including Broad-leaf Cotton-bush\* (*Gomphocarpus cancellatus*) and other Milkweeds. Some of these plants, for example, Swan Plant\* (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*) and Red-head Cotton-bush\*, which has attractive orange flowers, are an asset to any garden, but Broad-leaf Cotton-bush\* is the most robust plant for breeding this species in the Adelaide area. It is worth remembering that Broad-leaf Cotton-bush\* is already a serious weed in some parks and reserves, and should not be grown close to bushland. 'Dead-heading' the flowers before they can set seed is an effective control measure in most cases.

If these large and spectacular butterflies come to breed on your Milkweeds, the first sign you will notice will probably be the boldly-striped gold, black, and white caterpillars that will rapidly chew into your bushes. With careful searching on these same plants, you may be lucky enough to find the pale blue-green chrysalis with its iridescent golden highlights. They are surprisingly hard to find, considering their beauty!

**Caterpillar food plants:** Cotton bushes. The caterpillars eat the flowers and soft green parts of food plants.



**Foreign species:** Broad-leaf Cotton-bush\* (*Gomphocarpus cancellatus*), Narrow-leaf Cotton-bush\* (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), Red-head Cotton-bush\* (*Asclepias curassavica*).

The largest butterfly commonly seen in South Australia, the Wanderer is in fact a migrant to this country. While there is speculation that it is a strong flyer, able to cross oceans on its large wings, in fact there is evidence that it finds the 10 km crossing from the Fleurieu Peninsula to Kangaroo Island at the limit of its powers.

It is remarkable for forming over-wintering clusters where many hundreds of individuals gather, and a grouping of this sort has been noted at Waterfall Gully in the Adelaide foothills.

The butterfly is unmistakable, with its large (90–95 mm) wingspan and handsome appearance. The upper surfaces of the wings are coloured tawny orange and the outer margins are coloured black, as is the tip of the forewings.

