

Expert and advocate for iconic monarch butterfly has died

July 21 2018, by Ben Finley



In this Dec. 2, 2016, photo provided by the Center for Biological Diversity, Lincoln Brower poses for a photo at Sweet Briar College in Lynchburg, Va., when the Center for Biological Diversity presented Dr. Brower with the EO Wilson Award for Outstanding Science in Biodiversity Conservation. (Center for Biological Diversity via AP)

Lincoln Brower, who was considered one of the foremost experts on the iconic monarch butterfly and a scientist who advocated for the declining species' protection, has died. He was 86.

Linda Fink, his wife, confirmed Friday that Brower passed away Tuesday at home in Nelson County, Virginia, after a long illness.

Brower studied the orange-and-black-winged insect for more than six decades. It is famous for its epic migration each year.

"What attracted Lincoln is they're so incredibly interesting," said Karen Oberhauser, a monarch expert and director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum.

Light as a paper clip, the [butterflies](#) migrate like birds or whales. Most travel 2,000-plus miles (3,200-plus kilometers) from various states in the U.S. and Canada to the mountains of Mexico. A much smaller number goes to the California coast.

In those places, the winter climate typically doesn't freeze them. But it's cool enough that the insects maintain their fat preserves to begin their return.

It's a multi-generational journey north as the butterflies and their offspring feed off milkweed. Eventually, the cycle starts anew.

Brower spent a lot of time in Mexico, where massive clusters of monarchs hang like Spanish moss in fir forests.

"Just imagine a place where there are a hundred million of whatever you were studying hanging from the trees," said Brower's son, Andrew

Brower, who studies butterflies and is a biology professor at Middle Tennessee State University.



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Brower also charted the butterflies' stark decline. Its overall population has fallen by about 80 percent over the last two decades, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, a conservation group.

Herbicide use, logging and severe weather events have all threatened the

butterfly. In 2002, freezing temperatures and rain lead to a massive die off in Mexico.

"Sticking my hand to gently pull out the beautiful delicate creatures I've worked with for 25 years, there was an almost overwhelming feeling of sadness," Brower told The Associated Press.

In 2014, Brower placed his name alongside conservation groups to petition the federal government to protect the monarch under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to make a decision next year.

"He was the only scientist who joined the petition—it's a gigantic deal," said Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity. "A lot of scientists shy away from advocacy."

Brower grew up in northern New Jersey, his son said. He earned a biology degree from Princeton University and a Ph.D. in zoology from Yale University.

He taught at Amherst College before moving to the University of Florida. At the time of his death, he was a professor at Sweet Briar College in Virginia and an emeritus professor at the University of Florida.

"If the monarch butterfly migration is to survive, it will be in large part thanks to Dr. Lincoln Brower's dedication and work during the past half century," Homero Aridjis, a former Mexican diplomat and environmentalist, said in a statement.

Besides his wife and son, Brower is survived by a daughter, Tamsin

Barrett, his son said.

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