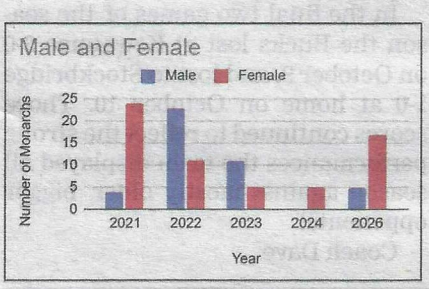
nts and staff of Washington Island School.

Students Report on Plum Island Monarch Populations

By Miranda Dahlke

According to the data Washington Island School students have collected since 2021, there is not a high prevalence of the parasite Ophryocystis elektroscirrha (OE) found in the monarch populations captured. In fact, the only year OE was found on butterflies we captured was in 2022. This data is one of many students in grades 5-10 collect when they capture a butterfly on Plum Island.

\On Sept. 11, students from Washington Island School took a boat ride out to Plum Island, in partnership with Friends of Plum and Pilot Island (FOPPI), and captured 36 monarch butterflies. Monarchs are making their annual migration south towards Mexico. When students catch a butterfly, not only do they get a tag to log to monarchwatch.org, but they also collect sex, forewing length, fat scores, damage scores, mating status, and an abdomen scale sample to test for OE. The data collected is submitted to monarchwatch.org and sent to Project Monarch Health at the University of Georgia. This year, I invited a panel of experts to hear from my 9/10 Biology students. This included Principal Tim Verboomen, School Board Members: Kirsten Purinton, Mike Thielke, Terry Foster, Art and Nature Center Naturalist Steve Waldron, FOPPI Member Ginney Harney, and USFWS Representative Frank Gercz. In addition to the presentation, students will be creating a display in the Art and Nature Center for the 2027 season, sharing their data and information about OE with the public. Here are some reflections from the students from their day on Plum Island.



has mated." -9th grader

"My favorite part was the mix of the groups, so I got to talk to the younger class and find out things about their classes and life, but I also like measuring the butterflies and seeing how different the sizes of butterflies' wingspans can be." 10th grader

"Friday, when I went monarch tagging on Plum Island, I had a great time! Plum Island is beautiful, and I hope to go back. One of my favorite parts of monarch tagging was when we got back to the school and got to test the butterflies for OE. (OE is a bad parasite) Luckily, none of the monarchs had OE." - 7th grader

"My favorite part of monarch tagging was trying to catch butterflies in the forest." - 5th grader





PHOTOS BY MIRANDA DAHLKE

"My group and I learned and saw many different traits and learned much more about what monarchs have to offer. One thing in specific that I saw that I thought was very fascinating was learning about the different traits that the males and females have. Specifically, when my group and I were filling out our data sheet while tracking one, we had caught a female monarch, and to see if it has mated or not, you have to gently rub the abdomen. To tell if it has or not, you rub its abdomen, and if you feel graininess or lumps, it has mated; but if not, it is just squishy and flat. We had caught many other females that day before catching this one, and it was in fact the only one that we caught that

The 9/10 grade Biology students presented data from our Monarch Tagging adventures on Plum Island from the past 5 years to a panel of experts.



PHOTOS BY MIRANDA DAHLKE

Students capturing, tagging, and releasing butterflies on Plum Island.