



 [Earth](#), [Oregon](#), [Wildlife](#)

## Monarchs Rising From the Ashes

 October 16, 2020

### Wildfire Strikes Southern Oregon

In the last ten years, Oregon saw 500,000 acres burned by wildfires annually. Nearly [twice](#) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/09/10/wildfires-decimate-oregon-latino-community/>) that amount burned in three September days of 2020. This post is about one of those tragic days that arise from a crisis.

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ed a wildfire that raged across parts of was on September 8 when 2800 <https://mailtribune.com/news/top-stories/more-than-phoenix>) from north Asland through Talent and Phoenix to southern Medford burned from the Almeda fire that rendered most in the Rogue Valley grasping to comprehend the gravity of unfathomable loss. For those that were home, they had minutes to grab their families and their animals and flee from the flames having only the clothes on their backs. Fish tanks, wildlife, and outdoor cats were placed in the hands of fate. Successions of booms were heard as propane tanks exploded up and down streets adding fuel to an already out-of-control fire. For those who were at work, there was no option to return home and rescue beloved indoor animals. The fires were moving too quickly. Important documents, family photos, favorite gifts, memorabilia passed from parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, turned to ashes. Everyday items like silverware, cups, plates, medication, sheets, towels, rugs, clothes, shoes, and all creature comforts, gone. Musical instruments, books, records, toys, furniture, appliances, and gardens, all destroyed or turned to unrecognizable rubble. What remained was inexplicable grief and trauma.

Now, children who were already trying to navigate the challenges of life during a pandemic have to grapple with doing so while homeless, because 50% of the children at Talent Elementary and [80% of the children at Phoenix Elementary](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/parenting/fires-displacement-distance-learning.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/30/parenting/fires-displacement-distance-learning.html>) have all lost the one place that can bring a sense of safety when the world feels like it's falling apart—home.

## Robert Coffan

The remainder of this post is by guest writer **Robert Coffan**. Robert is the Founder/Chair of [Western Monarch Advocates](https://www.westernmonarchadvocates.com) (<https://www.westernmonarchadvocates.com>), Co-founder of [Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates](https://www.somonarchs.org) (<https://www.somonarchs.org>), and former environmental restoration consultant and adjunct professor (hydrogeology) at Southern Oregon University. Robert, a busy grandpa, is passionate about the biodiversity of the northwest, and greatly concerned with the plight of our pollinators. He has joined forces with others to restore our western Monarch population. As if we need any more sobering news, the western Monarch population's serious decline has reached the point of [quasi extinction](https://www.westernmonarchadvocates.com/stats-and-info) (<https://www.westernmonarchadvocates.com/stats-and-info>). But the message from Robert offers us a sprinkle of hope in what sometimes feels like a maelstrom of bad news.

## Ellie, Hunter, and the Monarchs

Today, I went to Orchard Hills Elementary school to tag and release a couple of wild monarch butterflies. I do this often. It's always rewarding, and a lot of fun to interact with a classful of wiggling, giggling 1st graders who just can't wait to raise their hands and answer a question that you have not even asked yet. "Passing the baton" and all that. But today... today was a day like no other.

Hunter (7) and his big sister Ellie (10) arrived with their Mom, and they proudly showed me the two monarchs that emerged from their chrysalises the day before. They explained how their Grampa and Gramma had introduced them all to the wonderful magic of the monarch butterfly. And two wonderful teachers were there, Miss Ashley and Miss Jamie. The caterpillars had been found a week or two before, munching away on milkweed in Phoenix Oregon. But that was before *The Fire*.

## Empty Hallways

But where were the other children? Where were Hunter's little classmates? The school

hallways were empty. The boisterous laughter of fifty exuberant 6 and 7-year olds is masked away at the other end of smartphones and laptop monitors. They could only see and hear through the laptop screen and tinny microphone as they sat alone in their own chrysalises- not because of this fire, but because of another kind of fire sweeping through the lands. Three of the children I see in the small rectangular boxes on the faded computer screen are not calling from their homes; they are calling from a motel room. Their homes are gone now.



Hunter – the circles (top center) indicate the two released butterflies





Charred Milkweed

## Safely Tucked into Their Chrysalises Just a Day Before Fiery Mayhem

And so, we all did our best to share the “A-ha!” moment of releasing a monarch back into the wild; in the sooty, crumpled, ghostly apocalypse. And I thought...These two lone monarch butterflies I hold in my hands have been blissfully unaware. They were safely tucked into their chrysalises just a day before fiery mayhem struck. Ellie and Hunter would not evacuate without them! Protected, the two chrysalises did not feel the burn of horizontal flames screaming with the winds across the streets. They could not hear the explosions of propane tanks as the fires flew through the nearby businesses and the buildings quickly writhed into groaning rubble. They were unaware of the incredible hospitality of the business owner in nearby Ruch who came out into the parking lot at 10:00 at night to tell the 100-plus evacuees who had fled the flames and had to sleep in their cars, that she and her staff would continue to serve food until it was gone and leave the tiny restaurant open all night for use. They left behind the choking smoke and the flashing strobes as our emergency heroes went house to house to evacuate in the

darkness. And...

they could not see it when Hunter and Ellie's grandparents home in Talent burned to the ground.



Gramma and Grampa's Home

## Isabelle and Dusty Rising from the Ashes

Yet, here they are today in this quiet ghostly aftermath; these two magnificent creatures who started their lives just days before the mayhem and are now ready to rise and take flight into the blue clarity above. I would like to think that a part of Hunter and Ellie are with them, rising from the ashes like a Phoenix. Aware of what happened, and moving on with renewed strength and resolution. The kiddos named them Isabella and Dusty. One is a boy and one is a girl. Their research tag numbers are E1836 and E1837, respectively. Please watch for them. Please make way for them.



Isabelle

And when the electronic screen to the children went blank, and the tinny microphone was turned off, and the thank-yous and goodbyes were over, and I was alone...I let my tears run free at last and mix into the ash at my feet.

Our Western Monarchs will survive. They are wild. They are resilient. And they are tougher than we think. The people of Phoenix and Talent in Southern Oregon will survive. We are resilient. We are tougher than you think.



~Many thanks to Robert for sharing this incredible story and photos. I'm grateful for all he does to protect monarchs and to make the planet a better place.~

If you'd like to connect with Robert and learn more about state of the monarch, join this Facebook [event](https://www.facebook.com/events/399134208135399) (<https://www.facebook.com/events/399134208135399>) on October 25 hosted by Pollinator Project Rogue Valley.

## Lend a Virtual Hand

For anyone who wants to lend a virtual hand, the **Phoenix-Talent School District** is gratefully receiving [donations](https://www.phoenix.k12.or.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=2631) (<https://www.phoenix.k12.or.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=2631>). As more than half of the families within the district lost their homes, these kids are the ones who were sitting in motels for their start of virtual school. The district will do all the administration and every penny will be used to help the families.

Our Family Farms is another of the many worthy organizations grateful for [donations](https://www.ourfamilyfarms.org/farmworker_housing_fund?utm_campaign=farmworker_housing_update&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ourfamilyfarmscoalition) ([https://www.ourfamilyfarms.org/farmworker\\_housing\\_fund?utm\\_campaign=farmworker\\_housing\\_update&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=ourfamilyfarmscoalition](https://www.ourfamilyfarms.org/farmworker_housing_fund?utm_campaign=farmworker_housing_update&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ourfamilyfarmscoalition)). Your donation will support the distribution of seed grants that range from \$1,500 to \$15,000 to farm workers and their families who need help getting back on their feet.

This [link](https://www.ashland.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=18041) (<https://www.ashland.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=18041>) will take you to a site showing others ways to help out.

**For my friends in the Rogue Valley** who are reading this, please know that our hearts are with you. Feel free to share your experience in the comments section and/or to share any other organization accepting donations that directly benefit fire victims in need. 💜

"In order to rise  
From its own ashes  
A phoenix  
First  
Must  
Burn."

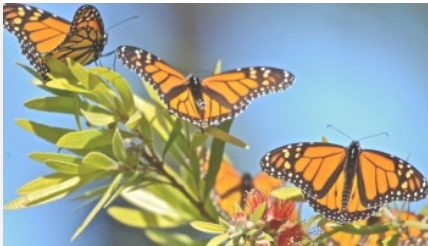
— **Octavia E. Butler**, *Parable of the Talents*

"For a star to be born, there is one thing that must happen: a gaseous nebula must collapse.  
So collapse.  
Crumble.  
This is not your destruction.  
This is your birth."  
— **Zoe Skylar**

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## 2 Comments



Scott 1 day ago

A terrible, awful, and lovely story. Bon voyage Isabelle and Dusty...





[Kenda](#) 1 day ago

♥ you.

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