

OCCURRENCE OF COMMON MILKWEED IN IOWA. Dawn E. Refsell and Robert G. Hartzler, Graduate Research Assistant and Professor, Department of Agronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011, and Douglas D. Buhler, Professor and Chair, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Larvae of monarch butterflies feed exclusively on members of the Asclepidaceae family. Common milkweed is the species most utilized by monarchs in the corn belt due to its abundance. The importance of common milkweed occurring in agricultural settings in the monarch life cycle is poorly understood. A survey was conducted from 1999 to 2001 to determine the relative abundance and stability of common milkweed in different vegetative habitats across Iowa. The initial survey in 1999 determined that approximately 50% of corn and soybean fields in Iowa were infested with common milkweed. In subsequent surveys in 2000 and 2001, row-crop fields infested with common milkweed declined to approximately 35%. In contrast, roadside right-of-ways infested with common milkweed were stable at approximately 75% from 1999 to 2001. The initial 1999 survey determined a high infestation frequency in land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program. A more extensive survey (100 sites) of undisturbed habitats in 2000 determined that 90% of these sites contained common milkweed. Swamp, honeyvine and eastern whorled milkweed were present in 5, 4 and 1% of the undisturbed habitats, respectively. These data, combined with information concerning land use patterns; can help determine the relative importance of milkweed occurring in agricultural land in the life cycle of the monarch.