

# Monarchs grab spotlight in tourist's view of Santa Cruz area

By PATRICIA CONNELL

LOS ANGELES TIMES

SANTA CRUZ — It's been more than 20 years since I moved to Los Angeles from New York City, but certain things about wild California never lose their exoticism: Joshua trees. Hummingbirds. Migrating whales. Redwoods.

Then there are monarch butterflies.

Starting every October, thousands of monarchs from northwestern United States and Canada make an epic journey to winter along the California coast, with numbers peaking in November and December.

The state is speckled with "overwintering" spots, but one of the most renowned sites is Natural Bridges State Beach in Santa Cruz. The city even holds a festival each October to welcome back the winged visitors, but the destination remains an ideal getaway for several months.

My husband, Tony, and I arrived in downtown Santa Cruz midday on a Friday. A spin down coast-hugging West Cliff Drive brought us to Natural Bridges State Beach, where a boardwalk leads from the visitor center to a viewing platform in a eucalyptus grove where the insects roost.

Tours are scheduled for 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Feb. 15.

At first it was tough to spot the critters, except for a few flitting overhead. But Tony's binoculars revealed hundreds of butterflies clustered in tree limbs, gently folded so only the muted colors of their undersides showed.

Because the day was gray and chilly, most remained dormant in the trees. The calm captivated us.



Associated Press

Corban Ricketts, 6, runs along the surf at Natural Bridges State Beach in Santa Cruz on Nov. 22. The state is speckled with "overwintering" spots, but one of the most renowned sites is Natural Bridges.

ceiling of the half-acre Santa Cruz greenhouse.

Before our return flight Sunday, we found one more way to commune with nature.

A free arboretum at University of California at Santa Cruz features a collection of plants from Down Under. We found ourselves lost among the mostly unmarked paths of the sprawling Australian Garden.

Even in the fog that blanketed the arboretum that day, it was clear that the stars of the show were dozens of species of banksia, shrubby trees with spiny

leaves and flamboyant flowers that resemble fat brushes, spikes or ears of corn. The otherworldly flowers are joined by bizarre seed pods, recalling mussel shells in various stages of opening.

...  
If you go....

SEA & SAND INN: 201 W. Cliff Drive. 427-3400 or [www.santacruzmotels.com](http://www.santacruzmotels.com)

ANTONELLI BROTHERS BEGONIA GARDENS: 2545 Capitola Road. 475-5222 or [www.antnellisbegonias.com](http://www.antnellisbegonias.com)

NATURAL BRIDGES STATE BEACH: 2531 W. Cliff Drive.

423-4609, and [www.santacruzstateparks.com](http://www.santacruzstateparks.com) or [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK: 21600 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek. 338-8860, [www.bigbasin.org](http://www.bigbasin.org) or [www.santacruzstateparks.com](http://www.santacruzstateparks.com)

HENRY COWELL REDWOODS STATE PARK: 101 N. Big Trees Park Road, Felton. 335-4598, [www.santacruzstateparks.com](http://www.santacruzstateparks.com) or [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

UC SANTA CRUZ ARBORETUM: 1156 High Street. 427-2998 or [www.ucsc.edu/arboretum](http://www.ucsc.edu/arboretum)



Associated Press

Monarch butterflies huddle together at Natural Bridges State Beach in Santa Cruz on Nov. 22. Starting every October, thousands of monarchs from northwestern United States and Canada make an epic journey to winter along the California coast, with numbers peaking in November and December.



vided so only the muted colors of their undersides showed.

Because the day was gray and chilly, most remained dormant in the trees. The calm captivated us.

On warmer, brighter days where temperatures exceed 60 degrees, the insects bask in the sunlight and feed on nectar, said Amber Cantisano, an interpretive specialist at the park.

A few other tourists visited during our trip. Many first-timers couldn't contain their oohs and aahs upon discovering that what appeared to be a branch of dead leaves was a clump of butterflies.

We strolled down to the beach. Just offshore, pelicans and gulls crowded the one remaining natural stone bridge.

The rock underfoot and in the cliff face was beautiful, with crevices and streaks of color like rough-hewn, sculptural pottery. Low mud stone cliffs held tide pools teaming with life.

Grateful that we had happened upon the beach at low tide, we scrambled about. A sign declared the obvious: "Tide pools contain a diversity of marine life equal in variety to all the marine life found in the ocean."

Dozens of tide pools, pockmarked the rocks, creating shallow depressions ranging from a few inches to two feet in diameter and making homes for limpets, mussels, anemones and barnacles. At the cliff base, orange sea stars clung to rocks in the tide line.

From Natural Bridges we drove back along West Cliff Drive, stopping at Lighthouse Point, home of the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum.

We didn't go inside, but we did admire the earnest, life-size bronze statue of a surfer — erected in 1992 to honor the sometimes treacherous sport. A nearby bench memorialized "all surfers who have caught their last wave Santa Cruz Surfing Club."

Barking, bellowing sea lions adorned a big rock looming just offshore. Below us was the popular surfing spot Steamer Lane.

We hadn't hugged a redwood in a long time, and that was the goal for Saturday. Unable to choose between the two nearest state parks with old-growth redwood forests — Big Basin and Henry Cowell — we visited both.

We headed north on Route 9, through Felton and Ben Lomond, to the eastern entrance of Big Basin Redwoods State Park near Boulder Creek.

Established in 1902, Big Basin is the oldest state park in California. A couple of hours roaming through the woods gave us only a taste of its 18,000 acres, but a chat with a hiker fired me up to return one day for the Skyline to the Sea Trail, which has a 12-mile section leading from park headquarters in the redwoods down to the Pacific. Can there be a more quintessentially California experience?

To check out more domesticated flora, we visited Antonelli Brothers Begonia Gardens, in business since 1935. Thousands of brilliant blooms — some resembling roses, some camellias, some begonias on steroids — spilled from counters and hung from the

the arboretum that day, it was clear that the stars of the show were dozens of species of banksia, shrubby trees with spiny

la Road. 475-5222 or www.antonellisbegonias.com

NATURAL BRIDGES STATE BEACH: 2531 W. Cliff Drive.

UC SANTA CRUZ ARBORETUM: 1156 High Street. 427-2998 or www.ucsc.edu/arbo-retum

thousands of monarchs from northwestern and Canada make an epic journey to the California coast, with numbers peaking in December.