

NEARLY READY FOR THEIR Migration



Butterflies flutter about the grove at Natural Bridges State Beach on Saturday.

BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Butter flies
A few weeks remain to see the monarchs in Santa Cruz *1-8-12*

IF YOU GO

MIGRATION
FESTIVAL AT
NATURAL BRIDGES

WHAT: A festival for all ages celebrating local migratory animals

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Feb. 11

WHERE: Natural Bridges State Beach, Santa Cruz.

COST: Admission to the festival is free, although regular parking fees will be in effect.

DETAILS: 423-4609

TOURS: Guided monarch tours are held at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays

By JESSICA M. PASKO

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SANTA CRUZ — The dry, sunny weather might not have skiers or farmers rejoicing, but it's a boon for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. At Natural Bridges State Beach on Saturday, people gathered to catch a glimpse of the monarch butterflies that migrate here each fall before the insects leave the area in a few weeks.

The brilliant orange and black butterflies migrate south to Mexico or to coastal California to spend the winter, often traveling thousands of miles to find the overwintering areas used by their ancestors.

The insects arrive in Santa Cruz around October each year and will begin the next step of their migration in the upcoming weeks. The visitors' center at the park will be conducting guided monarch tours at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays until Feb. 11, when the park holds its annual Migration Festival event, according to Martha Nitzberg, the lead interpreter at Natural Bridges.

More than 20 community organizations and agencies will take part in the festival, which will feature hands-on activities and information on a wide variety of migrating animals. The Fish and Wildlife Department, for instance, will be hosting a game about endangered species, and there will be both taxidermy and live animals for children and adults to learn from. The event is designed with all ages in mind, said Nitzberg. There will be talks and lectures geared more toward adults as well as activities, stories and arts and crafts from the younger participants.

While the festival will focus on all different species of animals that migrate, it serves largely as a sort of farewell party for the monarchs as they begin leaving to head north once more.

"People come from all over to see them," said Nitzberg.

Visitors to the park can also purchase a packet of



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Docent Bonnie Clark leads a monarch tour Saturday at Natural Bridges State Beach.

SEE MONARCHS ON C3



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Shutterbugs are nearly as prolific as the insects in the butterfly grove at Natural Bridges.

MONARCHS

Continued from C1

milkweed seeds to plant as a way of attracting more butterflies. Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on the more than a dozen varieties of the plant, which isn't native to

Santa Cruz.

At the peak of the season, right before Thanksgiving, there were an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 monarchs making their temporary home at Natural Bridges, Nitzberg said. That's more than the park's staff has seen in the previous few years.

The butterflies' numbers

have already begun to dwindle at this point.

"The cold has had some effect," said Nitzberg.

Still, even with the decrease in population, the distinctive butterflies can be spotted fluttering in the park's monarch grove, which is the only designated state mon-

arch preserve in California, according to park officials. There are more than 100 overwintering sites in California, supporting as many as 2-5 million butterflies each winter, and Natural Bridges supports one of the largest overwintering colonies in the state.