

SAN JOSE MERCURY  
2-11-77

# Butterflies Hang On In Santa Cruz

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**SANTA CRUZ**—Thousands of orange and black Monarch butterflies have paused here on their annual migration toward Canada.

The butterflies cluster in eucalyptus trees in a hidden cove at Natural Bridges State Park.

Visitors who wish to seem them can park along Natural Bridges Drive and walk into the park through a back gate. Or they can drive through the main gate to the park on West Cliff Drive.

Those visitors who do come through the main gate can get a brochure from the park attendant which tells all about the butterflies.

Monarch butterflies come every year to selected, sheltered spots along the California coast. They have appeared recently at Natural Bridges State Park, and at other spots along the coast, including Pacific Grove and Big Sur.

Monarch butterflies begin to appear along the coast early in October, when the first chill of fall and a decline in nectar signal the need to migrate to the south to escape the killing cold of northern winters. The butterflies may travel over the Rockies and the Sierras from as far away as Canada to seek protection here in groves of Monterey pine and eucalyptus which offer shelter from the wind and a foliage that the butterflies can clasp with their sharp claws.

The butterflies form dense clusters on the trees, each one hanging with its wings down over the one below it to form a shingle effect

that gives some shelter from rain and warmth for the group. The weight of the clusters helps keep it from whipping in the wind and dislodging the butterflies. If a butterfly Monarch butterflies are unable to move at all.

On warm, calm winter days, the Monarchs leave their clusters to search for food which consists of about 90 per cent water and 10 per cent nectar, which is supplied by the eucalyptus trees during their blooming period of October



The Monarch butterfly has a haven at Santa Cruz park

—Staff Photo

through November. When the evening comes along with its cool air, the butterflies again form into clusters, but not necessarily in the same groupings that they started with in the morning.

The Monarchs remain in the more protected areas along the coast until March, when the warm days of spring herald the north-easterly migration. Their flight south from the northern regions is usually leisurely, but when they begin to head north again in March, the journey is a swift one with the butterflies having been clocked at speeds of 30 miles an hour.

The male Monarch butterfly initiates the mating, which takes place before and during the migration. After mating, the females seek out milk weed plants. This plant plays a crucial role in the life cycles of the Monarch for it is only upon the milk weed plant that the female will deposit her eggs. Within three or four days, depending on the temperature, the eggs turn dark gray and tiny little caterpillars eat their way out and begin eating the milk weed.

During the next 15 days the caterpillars eat non-stop and increase their weight 2,700 times.

Then the caterpillar lays a mat of silk fibers, attaches itself upside down to the mat, curls its body into the shape of the letter "J" and sheds its skin to replace it with a shell-like covering.

In another two weeks a radiant, nectar-sipping butterfly emerges.

The new Monarch butterfly then has to spend several hours basking in the sun, hardening its formerly limp and useless wings and getting its body functioning so it is ready to fly.