



PATRICK TEHAN/STAFF ARCHIVES

Monarch butterflies fly among eucalyptus trees Feb. 5 at Natural Bridges State Beach in Santa Cruz.

# Monarch butterflies returning

Butterflies

## Insects migrate to park for winter

By Cathy Kelly

ckelly@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Sunday's Welcome Back Monarchs festival included an array of ways to welcome the fragile insect that journeys as far as 3,000 miles to spend winter in California or Mexico.

About 40 volunteers pitched in at Natural Bridges State Beach's 31st annual celebration for the beloved orange and black butterflies that spend winter in a grove at the park.

People celebrated the charms of the butterfly and its phenomenal migration Sunday with butterfly-shaped pasta, poems, several purchases of butterfly-enticing plants, and butterfly paintings on children's faces.

There were four live bands, tours of the Monarch Grove and other Natural Bridges habitats and several art projects. Among the volunteers Sunday were Boy and Girl Scouts working to maintain the butterfly-friendly plants at the park.

"This is all about sharing the love of parks and 31 years of celebrating the return of the butterflies," said Martha Nitzberg, a State Parks lead interpreter. A

small part of the action Sunday, raffle and food sales, raises funds for the park, she said.

The celebration was started by a former ranger, Alex Weiss, and has expanded recently, she said.

"Our theme this year is 'Our Impressions and Expressions of Natural Bridges,'" Nitzberg said. "So we have all kinds of artists here. It's been great."

The eucalyptus grove is in a canyon area steps from the center that provides a haven for the butterflies as they cluster together and cling to the trees when the temperature drops below 60 or so degrees.

The first monarch was spotted in the area around the first of September this year, which is normal, Nitzberg said.

That was a top question at the Monarch Grove, she said. There, scores of visitors Sunday took a stroll down the wooden walkway through the trees to get a glimpse of the butterflies, using spotting scopes and learning about the butterflies from docents and a series of signs posted along the way.

Sylvia Santana, 62, of Twain Harte, who came to the celebration with her husband, said she saw several butterflies and learned a lot about them on a walk through the grove.

People celebrated the charms of the fragile butterfly and its phenomenal migration Sunday with butterfly-shaped pasta, poems, several purchases of butterfly-enticing plants and butterfly paintings on children's faces.

"There were quite a few clustered in the trees," Santana said. "But you have to stand still to look and see them. This is very, very nice. As usual in Santa Cruz, everybody is warm and informative and pleasant."

Santana said she had not realized the Rocky Mountains are a dividing line and that butterflies west of that range migrate to Santa Cruz and other California coastal spots, while others east of the range winter in Mexico.

Sandi Douglas-Michel of Aromas, who was selling milkweed Sunday, informed one potential customer that there are 14 native varieties of milkweed.

Some of her displayed plants were flowering, though Douglas-Michel explained those were from South Africa or Mexico as the natives are dormant at this time of year.

At the children's craft area, Chuck Wisse watched as his 6-year-old daughter, Nicole, and her friend,

Richard Eller, colored monarchs with hues beyond the butterflies' typical orange and black.

"We love it," Wisse said. "It's put on very nicely and it seems like it gets better every year. It's a great turnout today."

One outgoing young visitor, Michael Tran, 9, of Milpitas, viewed it all with similar good cheer.

"I think this is a really good thing," Tran said, as he stood near a booth playing with a something called a Haikichi stick created by a Santa Cruz man. "If you like butterflies, this is a great place to go."

Monarch butterflies stop in Santa Cruz during their winter migration, staying in significant numbers from roughly October to February. A visitor center at Natural Bridges will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily through January, and tours of the Monarch Grove are held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekends. Reach the center at 831-423-4609.