

WELCOME BACK, MONARCHS

Welcome Back Monarchs Day

WHAT: A day of food, activities and music officially welcomes the monarchs back to their wintering grounds.

WHEN: Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

WHERE: Natural Bridges State Beach Information Center.

CONTACT: 423-4609.

MONARCH FACTS:

■ A female monarch lays roughly 700 eggs in her lifetime.

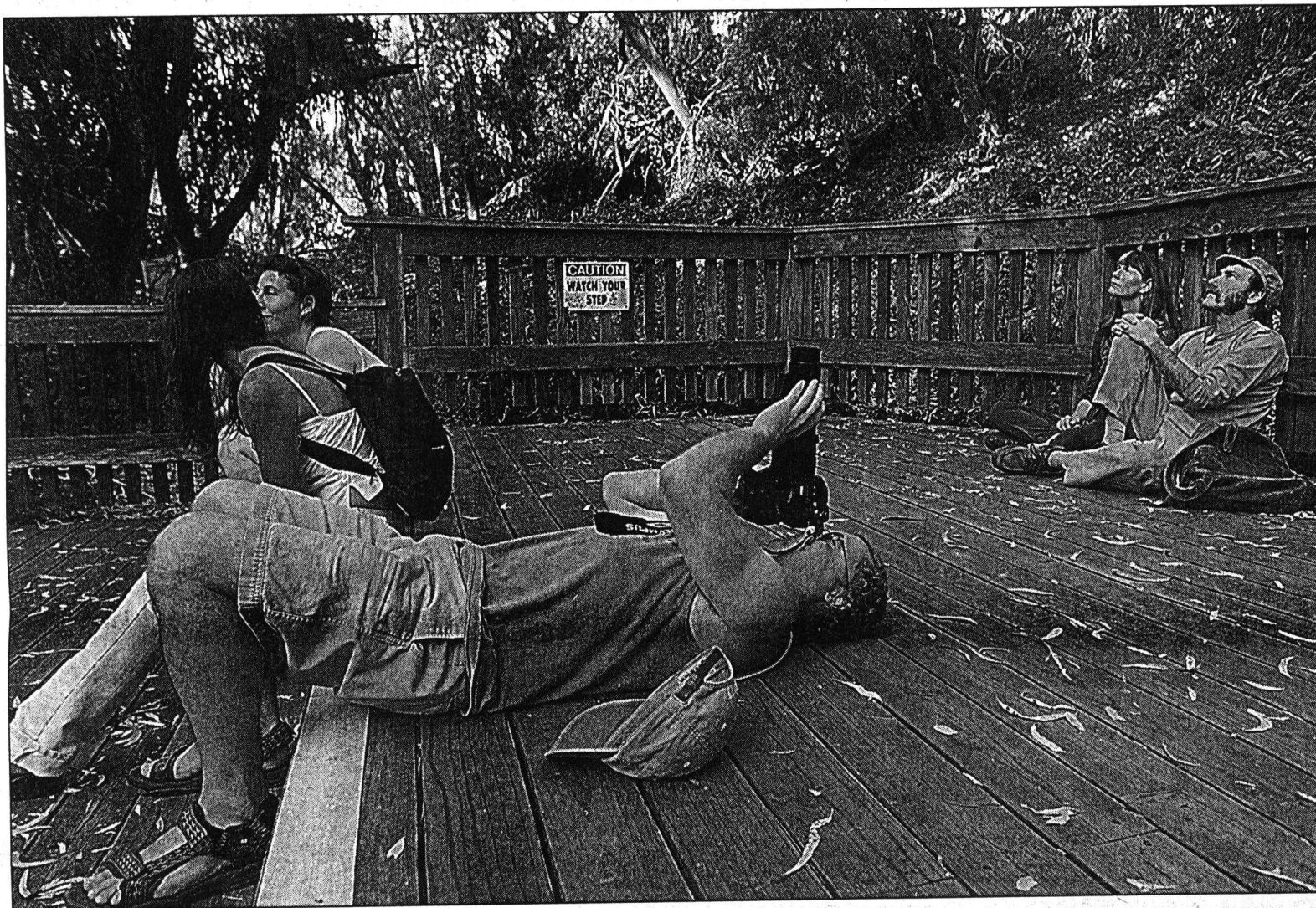
■ Adult monarchs mostly eat flower nectar, which is 20 percent sugar.

■ Monarchs have taste receptors on their feet, which they use to find the nectar in a flower.

■ Many butterflies migrate, such as painted ladies, red admirals and question marks. But only monarchs migrate to a specific overwintering site year after year.

■ It takes monarchs about a month to go through the stages from egg to adult.

Source: www.monarchwatch.org.



Butterflies flutter home for winter

By *Rachel Ehrenberg*
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Imagine traveling thousands of miles to stay in the home of your great-great-grandmother.

SANTA CRUZ For monarch butterflies, that journey is a way of life. Every fall, thousands of the half-gram insects fly as far as 2,000 miles to the wintering grounds where their relatives fed and lived the year before. For many monarchs, the journey's end is a grove of eucalyptus trees in Santa Cruz's Natural Bridges State Park.

The butterflies began drifting in to Natural Bridges — one of the 25-30 wintering sites on the California coast — in late September. About 30,000 will have arrived by the end of this month. There, they'll stay through late February.

Natural Bridges provides especially good habitat for the butterflies.

"Our eucalyptus are in a south-facing canyon, and there's an elliptical-shaped opening in the center of the grove. The angle of the winter sun is such that there's more sun in the grove in winter," said Martha Nitzberg of the state park.

The monarchs aren't the only ones visiting the park. Migrating people also come to gawk at the trees draped in thousands of butterflies.

Felicity Rosencranz of Santa Cruz was among them with 3-year-old son, Eli, scouting out potential field trip times for her son's nursery school.

"The kids are so excited and inquisitive. They love coming. There's a lot of staring," she said.

"Almost every day in October through February, there are five to six scheduled tours coming through from the community and the Bay Area," said Nitzberg. "We also get elder hostel groups, families — yesterday there was a couple here from New Zealand."

There are two geographically distinct monarch populations in North America. The western population overwinters along the California coast and breeds in areas west of the Rockies into southern Canada, while the eastern population overwinters in Mexico and breeds east of the Rocky Mountains.

During the day, the monarchs are out and about, nectaring at flowers. They can fly only when temperatures are 50 degrees or



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

TOP: Michael Gerlach drove over from Los Gatos to take photos of returning monarchs. **ABOVE:** A monarch butterfly makes itself at home at Natural Bridges State Beach.

warmer, so when the air starts to cool they return to the grove to cluster for the evening. However, contrary to popular belief, the clustering doesn't keep the monarchs any warmer.

"If you stick a thermometer into the center of a clump, there is no temperature dif-

ference. It's a combination of safety in numbers and a shingle effect," said Nitzberg.

When it rains, the way they are clumped together makes the rain run right off them.

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