



Royalty returns

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Monarch butterflies gather on an eucalyptus branch at Natural Bridges State Beach, where more of the majestic insects gather for the winter than at any other location in the western United States. About 45,000 monarchs are here now, and more are expected to arrive in the next couple of weeks. The butterflies were born this fall, some as far away as Canada, according to park interpretive specialist Martha Nitzberg. In the spring, the butterflies will mate and the offspring will fly north. Monarchs have been wintering at Natural Bridges since early in this century, Nitzberg said. When it is cold, they clump together in the leaves and branches of the park's Eucalyptus trees, but when it warms up, the masses come alive as the butterflies flutter into the sunlight. The park offers free butterfly tours Saturdays and Sundays at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., through Feb. 6. There will be a Migration Festival on Feb. 12, with activities, music, food and tours.