

Local

Butterflies are back

Celebration marks return of monarchs

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SANTA CRUZ — A cool fog kept most of the migrating monarch butterflies clustered together in eucalyptus trees at Natural Bridges State Park for Sunday's 12th annual Welcome Back Monarchs Day.

But that didn't stop the crowds from celebrating their return.

When the sun did peek through, the skies became lightly speckled with fluttering wings of orange and black.

Anyone showing interest in the monarch migration celebration was pinned with a bright orange-and-black crocheted butterfly by a woman known only as the Butterfly Lady. The butterfly lady, who prefers to remain anonymous, crocheted 1,350 butterflies throughout the past year to give away at the event.

She has been doing it for six years.

"I do it for the smiles," she said. "I does some magic."

After being pinned, guests enjoyed puppet shows featuring characters of nature, coloring, food and hourly docent-led tours of the monarch trees.

The butterfly tours, fun, games and food kept people coming to the park all day.

Natural Bridges State Park is home to the largest Western overwintering population of monarch butterflies in the U.S. Each year, from mid-October through February, monarchs come to the Natural Bridges eucalyptus grove by the thousands.

The butterflies feed on flower and eucalyptus nectar when the sun shines. When it's cool, they cluster.

"We've had more butterflies come here early this year," said Patty Quillin, Natural Bridges volunteer coordinator. "In the last two years, we get approximately 120,000. Hopefully we'll get more this year."

The money raised from Sunday's event will go back to the Monterey Bay Historical Association, a non-profit organization working with state parks to fund all educational programs in the district.



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Alexandra Finley, 3, gets some help coloring from her grandmother Dolores Finley.