



## Winter digs

Monarch butterflies pass the winter at choice California coastal locales within 1/2 mile of the ocean. Here are a few reliable spots for viewing them.

**Natural Bridges State Beach.** A 0.25-mile, wheelchair-accessible walk leads to an observation deck in the Monarch Butterfly Natural Preserve. \$6 per vehicle; free guided walks at 11 and 2 Sat-Sun. Off State 1 in northwest Santa Cruz; [www.santacruzstateparks.org](http://www.santacruzstateparks.org) or 831/423-4609.

**Pacific Grove.** So many monarchs flock here that the city is nicknamed "Butterfly Town, USA." The monarch sanctuary (free; [www.pacificgrove.org](http://www.pacificgrove.org) or 800/656-6650) is off Light-house Ave., near Ridge Rd.

**Pismo State Beach.** Look for monarchs near the North Beach Campground. No parking or entry fee; free guided walks at 11 and 2 daily. On State 1 at the south boundary of the Pismo Beach city limits; [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or 805/489-1869.



# Butterfly heaven

## Watch monarchs winter along Northern California's coast

BY ANN MARIE BROWN

**When it comes** to insects, most of us need an attitude adjustment. A guided walk with interpretive naturalist Martha Nitzberg at Santa Cruz's Monarch Butterfly Natural Preserve can do just that.

"In our culture, we have an inherent dislike for insects," Nitzberg says. "But many are very beneficial to us as pollinators of our food and flowers, and some are also very beautiful." In a few moments at the observation deck in the Natural Bridges State Beach preserve, her point becomes clear. In an insect beauty contest, the monarch butterfly reigns supreme.

These orange and black-winged lovelies arrive by mid-October at

several locations on the California coast, where they winter through February after an exhausting trek from as far north as Canada. Incredibly, no single monarch butterfly completes an entire round-trip migration; it takes several generations to cover the distance.

Late November into early December is when the most monarchs are present in California. At Natural Bridges, visitors may see thousands of butterflies flitting about in the breeze or clustered 25 feet or higher above the observation deck, clutching the leaves of eucalyptus trees. Since butterflies don't fly when it's below 55°, Nitzberg explains, sunny afternoons are ideal for viewing butterfly activity. Stormy weather can make for a disappointing visit, since the sheltering monarchs look like clumps of dead brown leaves.

Monarchs spend the warmer months in regions west of the Rocky Mountains where milkweed (the sole plant their larvae eat) has been historically abundant. Look for the demonstration milkweed patch near the Natural Bridges preserve to see monarchs in each metamorphic stage: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and, finally, butterfly. ●

**Migrating monarch butterflies** cluster in trees. During stormy weather, they hang with their wings closed.