

Monarch Butterfly Overwintering in a Warmer Climate

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We have our own Monarch Butterfly Milkweed patch, as a food source, for those monarchs that make their way up to Western New York State by late summer. The monarchs that visit our milkweed plants, migrate from their overwintering grounds in Mexico, starting their journey in March. The monarchs that inhabit the United States geography west of the Rocky Mountains overwinter in Eucalyptus tree groves along the pacific ocean in southern California. We visited the overwintering grounds located at the Goleta Butterfly Grove, located in Goleta, CA, about an hour and a half northwest of Los Angeles.



Monarch Butterfly Overwintering Cluster in Goleta, California

The Monarchs start arriving in Goleta in Mid November and start migrating north again in mid February. Amazingly they return to the exact same trees year after year. Once they leave the eucalyptus grove, they will seek out patches of milkweed where they will lay eggs. The eggs will hatch and the

larvae (caterpillars) will feed on the milkweed. The larvae will pupate and become mature adult butterflies. The adult butterflies will move further north. After four generations, the last generation will migrate back to their overwintering location in Goleta, CA. A similar succession of events will happen in the eastern United States, only the monarchs will overwinter in Mexico. The Goleta Butterfly Grove protects the butterflies so that their future is preserved.



The Greeting Sign for the Goleta Butterfly Grove

The trail wanders from the parking lot through a grove of eucalyptus trees located between a major highway and the Pacific ocean, along the back side of a residential neighborhood. This area is kept relatively warm by the warm water of the Pacific. The trees protect the butterflies from wind and helps moderate temperature extremes.



The Eucalyptus Tree Grove

As you wander along the trail, there are signs to follow that

direct you where the Monarch Butterflies are located. This is a beautiful trail between mid November and mid February, which is the rainy season for southern California. The soil is moist and winter annual weeds have greened-up and lined the edges of the trail.



Trail Marker

The butterfly clusters are not easily seen in the morning when it is cool and the butterfly wings are closed and the butterflies are holding each other together tightly. They hang on the trees in clusters containing many hundred to more than a thousand butterflies. They almost look like a broken branch with brown dead leaves. This may be a natural camouflage for their protection.



Clusters can be seen hanging along the trail

When the daytime temperatures rise or the sun comes out and warms the cluster, the butterflies loosen their grip on each other and stretch their wings if they can. A few will start to fly and you can see an occasional monarch flying in the grove.



A Spectacle of Nature!

The hanging cluster of monarchs looks similar to a swarm of honey bees hanging from a tree branch, when you look at them from a distance. There are multiple clusters on different branches of the same tree and on different trees. The clusters take different shapes.



As the temperature warms, the Monarchs stretch their wings

The overwintering of the Monarch Butterflies is one of those seldom seen and very amazing events. We were very lucky to visit the grove on a warm, partly sunny day, in mid January. For more information on Monarch Butterflies check out the FAQs from the USDA (United States Dept. of Agriculture)