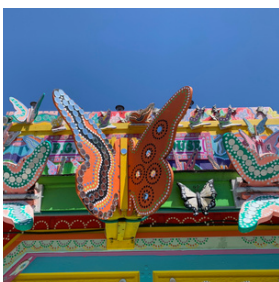
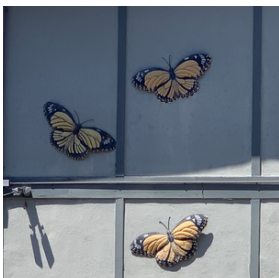
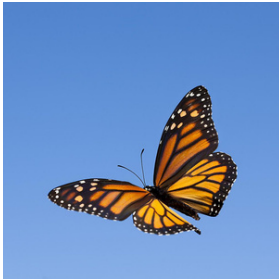


The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



DANAUS PLEXIPPUS

Pacific Grove calls itself “Butterfly Town, USA,” and we Pagrovians aren’t just flapping our gums. For nearly nine decades, our little city has embraced the mystique of the monarchs that migrate south each October and take up residence in the pine and eucalyptus groves here on the tip of the Monterey Peninsula. It is, as John Steinbeck wrote in *Sweet Thursday*, “one of those happy accidents of nature that gladden the heart.”

National Geographic once described the migration as “one of the greatest natural events on Earth.” So it’s nice to have a front-row seat to the experience.

The temptation is to compare the orange-and-black-winged beauties with the tourists who come and go - many of them enjoying the soundless splendor of PG’s Monarch Grove Sanctuary. However, it is very much a local source of pride, as evidenced by the annual October Butterfly Parade and businesses ranging from the Butterfly Grove Inn to the Monarch Pub.

But as I watched a monarch flap its way across my backyard one day, I wondered: What do I actually know about these... wonders? I decided to delve into some research and found a dozen remarkable factoids about the species known as *Danaus plexippus*. So take flight with me...

1. The milkweed butterfly’s main color echoes the secondary title, Prince of Orange, of King William III of England. It is believed that’s how the “monarch” got its name.
2. The monarch is the state insect of Alabama, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, and Texas... but not California (that would be the dogface butterfly).
3. Female monarchs can lay as many as 500 eggs over a two- to five-week period. Due to weather, disease, and predators, fewer than 10% of monarch eggs and caterpillars generally survive.



4. The monarch flaps its wings 5 to 12 times per second, which is actually slower than the average butterfly. Those wings, which look smooth to the naked eye, are actually covered with structures that look like thousands of tiny scales. Disturbing this scaly coating makes it harder for the monarch to fly.



5. PG's monarchs range from southern Canada through central Mexico, but the species also been found in Hawaii and the Cook Islands, Cuba and the Caribbean, New Zealand and Australia, Portugal and Morocco.

6. Fifteen years ago, monarchs were reared from pupae... aboard the International Space Station.

7. The monarch's southern migration through western North America can cover as much as 3,000 miles. Under the right conditions, they may travel as far as 100 miles a day and fly as much as a mile high.



8. Unlike whale migration, for instance, in which the same individual travels the same routes annually, none of the monarchs that arrive in Pacific Grove have ever visited before. Yet they know exactly where to go. Scientists believe they navigate via the position of the sun, as well as their internal compass in relation to Earth's magnetic field.

9. A typical monarch life span is 2 to 6 weeks. But monarchs migrating south live up to 9 months as they complete the journey and overwinter in places like PG. These butterflies have been called the monarch "super generation."

10. The monarch's annual return north is a multi-generational migration, each individual making only part of the trip. The butterflies that begin the journey are the great-great-grandparents of those that complete it.

11. Although they weigh less than one gram each - no more than a paperclip - monarchs have been known to break tree branches due to their abundance.

12. However... California's monarch population has decreased dramatically over the years, going from millions to tens of thousands. In fact, various conservation organizations have considered labeling it an endangered species. But Pagrovians and others are dedicated to preserving monarch habitats, and the migration continues. As does the local celebration.

*The Great
Tidepool*