

# SAN DIEGO P LLINATOR A LLIAN E

## Winter



Overwintering monarchs at Lighthouse Field in Santa Cruz, CA | Codi Hale

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## A Joyful Return

In 2021, we were thrilled to see the drastic increase of overwintering Western monarchs, especially after 2020 which was a record low year for migrating monarchs. We still remained cautiously optimistic that we would continue to see an upward trend in following years. Below is a graph

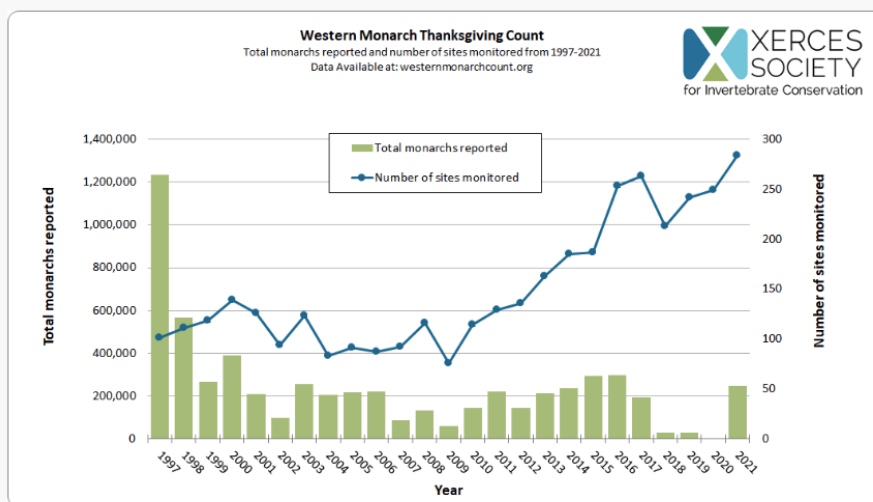
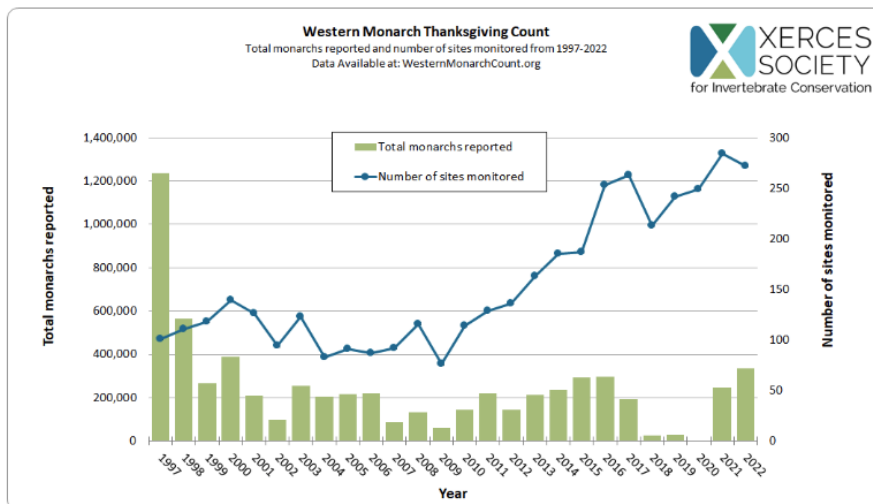


Figure 1. Total monarchs reported and number of overwintering sites monitored for the Western Monarch Thanksgiving Count from Nov. 1997 to Dec. 2021.

Final counts from the Thanksgiving data collection, which ran from November 12 through December 4, 2022, have been posted and over 330,000 monarchs were recorded at overwinter sites throughout California! Notable sites were in the Central Coast in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo Counties. You can [find more details about the Thanksgiving count here](#) from the Xerces Society, and see the graph below.



Many coastal overwintering sites were affected by the severe storms that came through in the beginning of 2023. In addition to damage to trees and groves, the storms affected volunteers' ability to collect data for the New Year count, which ran from December 24 through January 8. Read more about [the affect of the storms here](#). While the intensity of the recent storms was unprecedented, it is a good reminder that restoring and protecting overwintering sites is a crucial part of supporting monarchs. This is one of the central tenets of the Xerces Society's Western Monarch Call to Action, and you can [learn more about how to support overwintering sites in their management guide](#).

For a quick refresh on the Western Monarch's journey and life cycle, you can [check out this short video](#) made by the California State Parks Foundation.



Monarch clusters at the Pismo Beach overwintering grove | Codi Hale

## San Diego Native Milkweed Project

We are now in year 3 of the San Diego Native Milkweed Project, which is our effort to propagate milkweed native to our area and make it available for purchase at local nurseries. Local native milkweed is not widely commercially available now, and anything labeled "native" is sourced from a different part of California. We think that seed from the local area will thrive better and be more appropriate for habitat restoration, so we set out in partnership with US Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, Earth Discovery Institute and others to collect seed from wild sources and farm them in our San Diego soil.

If you are a backyard enthusiast looking to plant some monarch habitat, we are happy to offer a free packet of seeds. If you are working on a larger scale restoration project, we are happy to discuss larger quantities of seed. Contact us at [pollinators@rcdsandiego.org](mailto:pollinators@rcdsandiego.org) to get started!

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Due to the natural rhythms of the native milkweed, it goes dormant in late Fall and through the Winter. If you have a place in your garden where they will be safe through the Winter, you can get them in the ground and wait for them to germinate when the weather gets warm again in Spring. If you would rather wait to plant them, you can try the cold stratification method in which you chill the seeds 4-6 weeks prior to planting them in the Spring; usually March is a good time to start planting seeds or starts. [Here is a link to our website for more information](#) about milkweed planting information. You can also see [this guide from Xerces](#).

It is also worth noting that the Xerces Society advises against planting milkweed 1 mile from the Pacific coast and 5 miles from any overwintering sites. This is in an effort to not provide the distraction of food for migrating and overwintering monarchs. [Here is a map](#) of the overwintering sites in California for you to plug your address into and see where you land.

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Through our outreach efforts in 2022, we were able to share ~2.5lbs of seed with over 200 community members! Seed was shared at workshops, community events and also mailed directly to gardeners who reached out to us directly.

- Ocean Beach Community Garden Pollinator Gardening Presentation
- La Jolla Garden Club Pollinator Gardening Presentation
- Spring Fling Monarch Presentation at the Water Conservation Garden
- Mt Helix Pollinator Fair
- Master Gardener Association of San Diego County Pollinator Gardening and Milkweed Presentation
- Southern California Monarch and Milkweed Conference
- CARCD Virtual Conference
- Voluntary Conservation Workshop
- Fall Garden Festival at the Water Conservation Garden
- SD Floral Association Fair at Balboa Park
- Chula Vista Wellness Fair
- Monarch and Milkweed Showcase at Sparks Art Gallery



Ocean Beach Community Garden Pollinator Workshop lead by Annika Nabors



La Jolla Garden Club Pollinator Presentation lead by Annika Nabors



RCD of Greater San Diego County staff tabling at Water Conservation Garden's Fall Garden Festival

### Where Does Your Seed Come From?

We have enjoyed the process of creating a supply of regionally native milkweed and it got us thinking about what other plants species we would like to see cultivated for San Diego! Many seed companies offer pollinator mixes, but the plants offered might not be ideal for all terrains (coastal mix versus a montane mix) and/or may not be native to our region.

We would love your input on what kind of regionally specific seed mixes you've found, what you think is lacking from standard seed mixes and/or some species you think should be included in a regional pollinator seed mix.

Please email [pollinators@rcdsandiego.org](mailto:pollinators@rcdsandiego.org) with your thoughts!



Native *Asclepias eriocarpa* nursery in the Ramona Grasslands | Working Lands for Pollinators Site Visit

## Education & Events

### San Diego Audubon Society's Bird Festival

Wednesday, February 22nd - Sunday, February 26th | Marina Village Conference Center

Check out workshops, birding bike tours, and more at this multiday event. The SDPA will be giving a presentation on Milkweed for Monarchs, and tabling at the Sunday fair. [Learn more and register here.](#)

## SAVE THE DATE

### San Diego Pollinator Week | May 8th - 14th, 2023

Next Spring we are excited to bring you a full week of engaging and educational activities that support pollinators and our community! In collaboration with local partners, we are organizing:

- A field day to demonstrate native pollinator habitat on working lands
- Milkweed swaps to exchange tropical milkweed for a native variety
- A family friendly day to get kids exposed to the wonderful world of bees, butterflies, and more
- A pollinator gardening workshop

.... and more!

## Pollinator Resources

- [My Garden of 1,000 Bees](#) - A lovely PBS episode!
- If you or someone you know is interested in planting a pollinator garden, our [Pollinator Toolkit](#) is a great resource to share!
- For farmers and ranchers, [check out this guide](#) to see how incorporating native pollinator habitat can support your working land and coexist with carbon farming practices.



Small clusters of monarchs spotted near Balboa Park | Ann Baldrige

*"In winter, I plot and plan. In spring, I move." - H.R.*

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