



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Discover Winter Wildlife in California State Parks

Winter is a prime time for viewing wildlife in California State Parks. Visitors have the opportunity to watch elephant seals, Monarch butterflies, American bald eagles, whales, salmon and other creatures in their natural habitat.

Discover for yourself what California State Parks have to offer.

ELEPHANT SEALS

Año Nuevo State Reserve (SAN MATEO COUNTY), 55 miles south of San Francisco and the Golden Gate, is home to elephant seals, sea lions, and other marine mammals that come ashore to rest, mate, and give birth in the sand dunes or on the beaches and offshore islands. It is a unique and unforgettable natural spectacle that hundreds of thousands of people come to witness each year.

The reserve is a major gathering area for northern elephant seals, which may be seen year-round. The males battle for mates on the beaches. The females give birth to their young on the dunes.

During the breeding season, **December 15 through March 31**, daily access to the reserve is available only via guided walks. Advance reservations are recommended.

The public seal walks can be booked on-line at <http://anonuevo.reserveamerica.com/avail/search.jsp;jsessionid=bxGLCvdmckKQ6?tours.selectedTours=1>

AMERICAN BALD EAGLES

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area (FRESNO and MADERA COUNTIES) 20 miles northeast of Fresno, features quiet surroundings and spectacular viewing of the national bird, the bald eagle. The park is taking reservations for its annual winter bald eagle tours, which take place on Saturdays and Sundays during the months of January and February.

Before the tour, park rangers provide visitors with a presentation on a five-year study on bald-eagle annual flight paths. Then, visitors embark on a covered 25-person barge called the To'quill for a three-hour tour on Millerton Lake. Half-way through the boat tour, visitors are treated to coffee and hot chocolate. The tour will operate rain or shine. Rare heavy wind and tides could delay or cancel the tour, so visitors are advised to call ahead.

The tour provides lifejackets for each person onboard the vessel over six years of age. Children six years and under must wear their own U.S. Coast Guard approved child-size lifejacket. Visitors are encouraged to dress warmly and bring binoculars for the best viewing of the bald eagles and other wildlife.

The maximum capacity for the tour barge To'quill is 25 visitors; walk-ins are welcome if space is available.

The cost of the tour is \$15 per person, which includes entry into the park. The entire boat can be reserved for \$350. Special group tours are available midweek

To learn more or to make reservations call (559) 822-2332.

The park website is: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=587

MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

Natural Bridges State Beach (SANTA CRUZ COUNTY), on West Cliff Drive in Santa Cruz, celebrates the Monarch butterflies stay at the park with weekend tours through February.

Also in February, the park hosts the annual Migration Festival.

The park's Monarch Grove provides a temporary home for over 100,000 Monarchs each winter when the Monarchs form a "city in the trees." The areas mild ocean air and eucalyptus grove provide a safe roost until spring.

The Monarch Grove has been declared a Natural Preserve, thus protecting the Monarchs and their winter habitat from human encroachment or harm. This is the only State Monarch Preserve in California. Access to the preserve area is limited to a handicap accessible boardwalk and observation area.

Visitors can view the over-wintering Monarchs by walking down the park's wheelchair and stroller-accessible boardwalk to an observation deck in the eucalyptus grove.

The park also provides opportunities for viewing shore birds, migrating whales, and seals and otters playing offshore.

For more information, call the park at (831) 423-4609 or visit the website at:

http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=541

For large groups, the docent-led tours should be booked at least two weeks in advance.

WHALE WATCHING

Through March, visitors have the opportunity to view the return of the gray whale, the state's official marine mammal.

The annual migration of thousands of gray whales (up to 50 long and 45 tons each) begins in Alaska and moves south along California's coastline to birthing and breeding waters in Baja California. On their journey, the whales move past Point Reyes, the Farallon Islands, through Half Moon Bay and Monterey Bay, and follow the coastline along Southern California before reaching Mexico. The whales travel in small groups and stay close to the shoreline for protection from predators, such as killer whales. Traveling 70 to 80 miles per day, the whales' spouts of vaporized water (at times reaching 12 feet high) can be seen as the whales surface every three to five minutes to breathe. Their 12,000-mile round-trip trek is the longest known distance any mammal migrates on an annual basis. The whales' migration pattern reverses when they lead their new-born calves back to Alaska. It's always a good idea to call the park before your visit to check on current conditions.

State park whale watching sites include:

- **Mackerricher State Park** [MENDOCINO COUNTY] (Laguna Point) on the Mendocino Coast three miles north of Fort Bragg, phone: (707) 964-9112 or (707) 937-5804; website: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=436
- **Humboldt Lagoons State Park** [HUMBOLDT COUNTY] (Dry Lagoon), phone: (707) 677-3132; website: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=416
- **Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park** [DEL NORTE and HUMBOLDT COUNTIES] (Gold Bluffs Beach), phone: (707) 464-6101, extension 5301; website: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=415
- **Patrick's Point State Park** [HUMBOLDT COUNTY] (Palmer's Point and Wedding Rock) in Trinidad, phone: (707) 677-3570; website: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=417
- **Montaña de Oro State Park** [SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY] phone: (805) 528-0513; website: http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=592
- **San Simeon State Beach** [SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY] phone: (805) 927-2010; http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=590

SPAWNING COHO SALMON

Samuel P. Taylor State Park (MARIN COUNTY), on Sir Francis Drake Blvd. near Lagunitas, celebrates the annual return of the endangered Coho, or Silver Salmon to their spawning grounds in Lagunitas creek and it's tributaries. Salmon can be viewed migrating upstream and engaging in spawning behaviors such as digging gravel to lay eggs and fighting for territory or mating rights. The spawning season typically runs from November thru mid-January, with Steelhead Trout runs continuing through March. For more information, call the Ranger Station at (415) 488-9897. The park website is:
http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=469

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