

How California is teaming up with conservation groups to rescue the western monarch butterfly from extinction

Monarch butterflies, known for their distinctive orange and black pattern, once flocked to California in the millions, spending the winter clumped on trees as they migrated to and from the state's central coast.

But the population has sharply declined from 4.5 million in the 1980s, dropping to nearly 200,000 in recent decades before taking a precipitous dive in 2018. That year, the population fell to nearly 30,000, and when volunteers counted again in November, it had dropped to fewer than 2,000 – representing a 99% collapse in the last three decades.

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Horrified conservationists are scrambling to plant 30,000 of the native milkweed plants, which are crucial to the butterflies' life cycle, providing food for monarch larvae and adding the touch of poison that makes monarch colors so bright. Monarch caterpillars are entirely dependent on milkweed for two weeks of their life cycle, munching through about 30 leaves before they transform into jade green chrysalises to eventually emerge as butterflies.

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The state is providing \$1.3m for the restoration group River Partners to restore 595 acres (240 hectares) of monarch habitat along rivers and streams in California – while biologists [enlist the help](#) of gardeners, nurseries and backyard scientists to do their own plantings and help catalog monarch sightings.

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