

THE COAST

Blue butterfly is making a comeback

By Kirsten Farmer

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It's a cool, crisp July morning on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. A wisp of salty air rustles the emerald leaves of a sea-cliff buckwheat plant on a steep, rocky bluff overlooking the Pacific.

As passers-by jog and or walk their dogs on the dirt path of Palos Verdes Loop Trail in the Vicente Bluffs Reserve, most don't notice her — a small, flitting neighbor with spotted, pale-colored wings.

A female El Segundo Blue Butterfly — no bigger than an inch across — has just laid eggs in the white, clustered flowers of the

shrub. She depends on the plant for survival, as will her children.

Each new generation of the El Segundo Blue is a sign of hope. The species has been federally endangered for decades, stung by the decimation of sea-cliff buckwheat plants amid urban sprawl.

The inconspicuous little butterfly is making a discernible comeback in its indigenous coastal area, thanks to the efforts of groups such as the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy to restore native habitats.

"Our primary role in this conservation project is to create more habitat because we see a direct relationship between increasing the number of host plants and the in-

crease in the population of the blue butterfly," said Megan Wolff, volunteer coordinator at the PV-PLC.

From thousands to dozens and back again

The number of the El Segundo Blues stretching along the coastal dunes of Los Angeles — from Palos Verdes up to Ocean Beach near Santa Monica and inward to near the Los Angeles International Airport — was once in the thousands, according to Wolff.

That population saw a dramatic decrease to just hundreds and — then mere dozens — by the 1970s. The trigger: Widespread development began along the coastline.

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The El Segundo Blue Butterfly, once on the endangered species list, is making a comeback in coastal areas of Los Angeles.

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