



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

**TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (7:58)**

**PALOS VERDES BLUE BUTTERFLY (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH ERIC PORTER)**

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

**P R O C E E D I N G S**

(Music plays.)

It's an incredible story about second chances. For years, California's Palos Verdes blue butterfly was thought to be extinct, until a small population of these beautiful butterflies was discovered on the Defense Fuel Support Point in San Pedro, California. Now, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working closely with conservation partners to help this rare species rebound.

MS. LEON: Hello there. This is Sarah Leon for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and I'm on the phone today with Eric Porter, biologist at our Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office. Hi Eric, how are you today?

MR. PORTER: Hi Sarah. I'm doing well.

MS LEON: Alright now Eric, I have you on the line to talk about the Palos Verdes blue butterfly. What can you tell our listeners about this species?

MR. PORTER: Well, it's a small blue butterfly. Blue is the name of the family of butterflies. The males are blue on their upper side and females are a little more brownish on their upper side. They're small little butterflies—a little tough to spot when you're out in the field, but you can see them. And they typically occur in open patches within the local coastal sage scrub habitat.

MS. LEON: Okay, and can you tell our listeners the story behind this species decline?

MR. PORTER: Well, the story is that it's a subspecies of a much more common species—the silvery blue. And in about the mid '70s, the local butterfly biologists within the Palos Verdes Peninsula noticed that it was a distinct subspecies from the other silvery blue species. And so, in the mid '70s they actually classified it as a distinct subspecies of Palos Verdes blue butterfly. At the time, there was some concern about the species because its host plant, the coast locoweed, was in decline. And obviously when the host plant is in decline, the butterfly can have some problems. So, they started documenting the known occupied patches that the butterfly was found in, and just surveying every year to see how it was doing.

In the early '80s, they noticed that a lot of the patches were disappearing. And by that time, the species was listed as endangered, so there was a great deal of effort to start conserving the patches, but nevertheless, some of the few remaining patches were lost to development. By about the mid '80s, some of the local butterfly folks started to think that maybe the species wasn't there anymore because they weren't finding them in their annual surveys. There were two different papers published in the early '90s proclaiming that the species was probably extinct.

Then in 1994, there were some general biological surveys conducted at the Defense Fuel Support Point in San Pedro, California, which is a fuel depot used for all of the different military uses in the area. As part of that survey they noticed that there were some areas that looked like decent habitat for the Palos Verdes blue butterfly, and so they went out and looked in late winter, early spring to see if maybe the butterfly was there. And in fact, they found the butterfly there. So in 1994, it was rediscovered on this Navy depot, at the time.

Interesting thing is that they noticed it was using a different host plant. They thought the species only used this coast locoweed, but at the Fuel Support Point, they noticed it actually feeds on deer weed—a similar plant. So not only did they find the species again, they added to its host plant list. It was pretty exciting.

MS. LEON: Okay, so there was a period of about eleven years, like you said, that this species was presumed extinct. Of course we found it again in 1994, like you said. Can you tell us what it's like having a second chance to help a species recover?

MR. PORTER: People were pretty excited about it. They immediately set up a captive breeding program to make sure that this one little remaining population didn't blink out and cause an extirpated species for good. They brought in several different individuals and had them lay eggs on some plants and reared those eggs and developed a captive breeding program that supported maybe between 500 and 800 individuals, just as a refuge that if the wild population blinked out they would still have this captive population.

That captive breeding population was going well enough that they decided they could use some individuals for release. So they did a butterfly release within the fuel depot to see if they could start up a new population in that area. But then for a while the captive

program was having some trouble with disease and predation, so they didn't have enough individuals to do more captive breeding.

And then, maybe five years ago, they really took a deep look at their methodology and tried to improve their captive breeding program. With the help of some of the local partners, they got that breeding program to the point where now they have thousands of individuals—more than they need. And we have enough individuals to do releases throughout the historic range of the species.

It was definitely a collaborative effort. At the time, the Navy was in charge of the base. They were very supportive of the project and provided the funding and whatever resources were necessary to help get that captive breeding program going. And there were local conservation groups, most notable is the Urban Wildlands Group, that really provided a lot of the legwork and a lot of the scientific background for the project. They worked very well together.

More recently another local group, the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy, came on board and they've done a lot of habitat restoration to help prepare sites for future butterfly reintroduction efforts. They've already had a couple successful efforts, so things are going great.

And then three or four years ago, Moorpark College, a local community college, helped set up a second captive breeding facility. That's really where we've seen a lot of success. That's where they have thousands of individuals. They're training lots of undergraduate students on how to rear the butterflies and getting lots of good work. It's very exciting.

MS. LEON: Alright, and can you tell our listeners why this species is worth saving. I mean, right now it's Pollinator Week, so we're kind of in the mindset of pollinators do really great things for us. But you know if one species winks out, are we really going to miss it?

MR. PORTER: Well, I mean in this case, obviously this is a rare butterfly so it's probably not pollinating all the plants in the area. But it does have a close relationship with the coast locoweed, which is a rare plant in itself. While I'm not aware of any studies that have looked at how important the butterfly is to coast locoweed, you can imagine that it does pollinate coast locoweed and may be important for its survival throughout the peninsula. Like I said, this is a rare plant and if you have one species that focuses most of its energy on its host plant, certainly it will help the pollination process.

More importantly, because the Palos Verdes blue has brought out the conservation community. It has allowed us to conserve coast sage scrub, which is a rare habitat. And more specifically, it's a specific type of sage scrub that has open patches with the butterfly's host plants. Really, there's been a rallying effort among the community to try

and maintain habitat for the species, and it's going to be saved habitat for all kinds of species throughout the area.

MS. LEON: Well thank you so much, Eric, for taking the time out of your day to tell us about the Palos Verdes blue butterfly and of course our amazing partners that are doing great things for the species. I really appreciate it. It was a pleasure having you on.

MR. PORTER: I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon. Thanks for listening.