



BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Partnerships for California Butterfly Recovery

March 16, 2004

Organized by BFCI

Hosted by the Santa Barbara Zoo

Meeting Report

Introduction

The Butterfly Conservation Initiative (BFCI) was established in 2001 with two core objectives: (1) to make significant progress toward the recovery of 22 federally listed imperiled butterfly species in the United States; and (2) to increase public awareness of and direct involvement in butterfly conservation efforts. Since then, the scope of the BFCI has expanded to include non-listed but vulnerable North American butterflies. BFCI works towards its objectives via recovery, research, and education and outreach. BFCI now boasts 44 members, three contributors, and six partner organizations, all of which are providing either financial or in-kind contributions to support the Initiative's goals. Members and contributors are American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA)-accredited institutions; partners are the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS), National Wildlife Federation, Xerces Society, McGuire Center for Lepidoptera Research at the University of Florida, and Environmental Defense. BFCI members and partners have contributed to butterfly conservation and recovery throughout the US and Canada via captive rearing, habitat restoration, research, population monitoring, and education and outreach activities. Their sizeable contributions have made them respected conservation leaders in their local communities and beyond.

Fifteen of the twenty-two federally listed butterfly species are found in California and BFCI members have expressed an interest in becoming more involved in Californian butterfly conservation efforts. While some BFCI members in California are making contributions to butterfly conservation on zoo grounds, many are looking to become more involved in efforts that will connect them to larger statewide government and NGO-initiated efforts in the field.

BFCI took the first step towards engaging in these efforts by organizing the Partnerships for California Butterfly Recovery Meeting on March 16, 2004. The Santa Barbara Zoo, a founding member of the BFCI, hosted the meeting.



Photo by Travis Longcore, The Urban Wildlands Group. Palos Verdes blue butterfly

Meeting Goals

The overall meeting objective was to determine ways that accredited zoos and aquariums can best utilize their skills and resources to support organizations, agencies, and institutions working towards the recovery of California butterflies. Specific meeting goals were to: (1) impart essential information about California butterflies to new and key players in recovery efforts; (2) share current progress on ongoing butterfly recovery projects; (3) introduce government and academic scientists to non-traditional partners; and (4) explore potential action steps institutions can take to continue to support butterfly conservation, including efforts specifically targeting listed species.

Participants

Nineteen participants attended the three-hour meeting, including representatives from five AZA-accredited zoos, three nonprofit organizations, three US FWS offices in CA and OR, and one university. Participants from outside California brought extensive experience that could be applied to California-based partnerships and to demonstrate their interest in Californian and other western butterfly species recovery.

Meeting Agenda and Structure

The meeting began with an information exchange. Participants were briefed about the BFCI and its partnership-building experience and then BFCI members introduced themselves and their butterfly-related activities. The Urban Wildlands Group and the Carlsbad US Fish and Wildlife Office also provided background presentations. The status of recovery efforts for two endangered species, El Segundo blue and the Palos Verdes blue, were thoroughly discussed. The Urban Wildlands Group is currently developing captive rearing protocols for the Palos Verdes blue but would like to see another institution undertake complementary captive rearing. The Fish and Wildlife Service stressed the need to acquire, protect, and carefully manage and enhance some of these species' habitats. Due to resource constraints and in the face of continued development and habitat alteration, partnerships can be particularly important in the effort to acquire and manage these habitats. An hour-long general discussion about how the meeting's participants could work with US FWS and each other to further butterfly conservation and recovery in California followed.

Outcomes with Respect to Goals

Goal 1: Impart essential information about California butterflies to new and key players in recovery efforts.

- Joel Pagel, Division Chief of Listing and Recovery at the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office and Travis Longcore, science director at The Urban Wildlands Group presented information about the current status of California butterflies to all participants. The presentations included information on working with USFWS and the Endangered Species Act on listed butterfly recovery work, as well as information on the status of a number of local butterflies and their needs.
- While some meeting participants have spent years dedicated to the conservation of California butterflies and recovery of specific species, other participants were relatively

new to butterfly conservation and welcomed the opportunity to learn more as they become more active in these efforts.

Goal 2: Share current progress on ongoing butterfly recovery projects.

- Meeting participants learned about the specific efforts undertaken on behalf of the El Segundo blue butterfly and the Palos Verdes blue butterfly.
- Participants also learned about some of the opportunities and challenges facing US FWS and gained insight useful to groups working in partnership with that agency.
- Information about the butterfly recovery work done by BFCI members in other regions was also presented.

Goal 3: Introduce government and academic scientists to non-traditional partners.

- Participants learned about what non-traditional partners can bring to the recovery process, and also had a chance to meet and interact with potential colleagues from their own state and the larger Western region.
- One specific potential partnership was discussed at the meeting and others may be formed as the result of post-meeting communications.

Goal 4: Explore potential action steps institutions can take to continue to contribute to butterfly conservation, including efforts specifically supporting listed species.

- The needs for advancing butterfly conservation in California were described both generally and for individual species. From this, the group generated a "menu of opportunities" for contributing to the recovery of listed species (see page 4 of this report).



Photo by Travis Longcore, The Urban Wildlands Group Palos Verdes blue butterfly

California butterfly conservation. For many, this was the first time that traditional organizations working on butterfly conservation had been introduced to non-traditional partners like zoos and aquariums and it was an opportunity to expand the butterfly conservation effort to a larger set of players. Discussions provided context about the state of California butterfly populations, priorities, and opportunities and challenges for partnering and furthering California butterfly conservation and recovery. Outcomes included a “menu of opportunities” for integrating new players into continuing efforts and undertaking fresh initiatives. This meeting was the first step in what we hope will be the creation of partnerships that will ultimately benefit vulnerable butterfly species throughout California.

Conclusion

This meeting brought together people from a diverse range of institutions to lay the foundations for working together and incorporating new partners in

For more information about this meeting or BFCI in general, contact Shelly Grow: sgrow@aza.org; 301-562-0777 x263

Menu of Opportunities for Advancing California Butterfly Conservation

- Develop a landowner resource kit. Many private landowners are interested in participating in local conservation efforts but do not know how to proceed. A landowner resource kit would include information about easements, tax benefits, alternative land uses, funding opportunities for private landowners, local and regional organizations interested in helping, etc.
- Develop and distribute a list of priority habitat for vulnerable species. Federal agencies have identified parcels of land that need to be acquired or specifically managed to ensure rare butterfly species survival. This list could be used to direct funds for land acquisition to high priority sites.
- Develop a “Hilltop Happenings” program. This fundraising activity would include taking board members and donors to hilltops on lands that FWS has identified as habitat for specific butterflies and other insects of interest. A biologist would lead this one-day field trip and discuss the area and local diversity. Hilltops are especially suited for diversity and for inspiring people to help. Funds raised would be earmarked for purchasing that piece of land or other appropriate habitat.
- Assess interest and develop an “Adopt-a-Butterfly” program. Current popular interest in butterflies, fueled by media coverage of the 2003 wild fires in southern CA and their potential effects on the Quino checkerspot and other butterflies, may make this option attractive. Similarly, a “Pizza for Places” campaign could raise funds for protecting habitat of concern.
- Develop sample signage for restoration projects benefiting local California insects of concern. These educational efforts would raise awareness of small-scale restoration projects (i.e., median restoration, coastal buffer zones, etc.) and people’s impacts on those habitats.
- Develop a curriculum on native and exotic plants for school children that would teach kids to identify not only what should *not* be present but also what *should* be present in a given ecosystem.
- Develop a captive propagation facility for the Palos Verdes blue butterfly. Currently The Urban Wildlands Group operates a captive propagation facility for the Palos Verdes blue butterfly, but there is a need to develop a second facility. A second facility would further support recovery and help diffuse the risks of working with an endangered species. The Urban Wildlands Group would be available to provide technical support to an institution able to undertake this effort.