

## Antioch kite festival to raise awareness of local butterfly's plight

By Paul Bugarino Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

Posted:

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ANTIOCH -- Hundreds of kites painted like butterflies found only at this city's northeast shoreline will take flight over City Park this weekend.

A group looking to help preserve the Lange's metalmark butterfly is holding a kite festival from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday to help raise awareness about the endangered species' plight.

"It's a dire situation. We want people to see this as a symbol of their town and some of the unique species that are here, learn about what's going on and find out how they can help," said Rachael Van Schoik, an event organizer with the group Save the Metalmark Butterfly.

Participants can paint their own butterfly designs on kites, meet butterfly experts and get their face painted.

Festivities also include music, raffle prizes and free food and drinks.

The following Saturday, the group will hold an event from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. to do weeding, planting and other work at the Antioch Dunes National Wildlife Refuge, the butterfly's habitat.

Once a thriving population of more than 25,000 at the confluence of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers, the bright reddish-orange butterflies dwindled early in the 20th century as the growth of the Bay Area led to heavy sand mining and the area experienced industrial development.

The number of Lange's metalmarks that inhabit the preserve near the waterfront industrial area, has dropped since the late 1990s from near 2,500 in 1999 to 45 in 2006. The population dropped as low as 28 in 2010 before rising to 32 last summer.

A count to determine this year's population was held this week, but the results are not yet known.

The festival will also try to raise awareness about environmental concerns. The Wild Equity Institute, which works with the Save the Metalmark group as part of the advocacy group Tatzoo, filed an intent to sue four Antioch-area power plants -- two of which are not operational -- in December, saying emissions will increase nitrogen in the soil at the preserve.

The increased nitrogen helps weeds that crowd out native plants, including the Lange's metalmark butterfly's favorite naked stem buckwheat.

Since then, the power providers invited the group in to discuss the possibilities of how to change their emissions to reduce the impact on the land and protect the butterflies, said Brent Plater, the institute's executive director.

Contact Paul Bugarino at 925-779-7164. Follow him at [Twitter.com/paulbugarino](https://twitter.com/paulbugarino).

### IF YOU GO

What: Butterfly Kite Festival

When: 1 to 4 p.m., Saturday

Where: Antioch City Park, corner of A and Tenth streets

Cost: Free