

THE DAILY GAZETTE

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TODAY:
Partly sunny.
High 86/Low 64.
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NY ♦ 50 CENTS



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A look at the male Karner blue butterfly.

Karner blue could be state butterfly

Contest will let kids pick from five choices

BY LEE COLEMAN
Gazette Reporter

The Karner blue butterfly, an endangered species found in the Albany Pine Bush and parts of Saratoga County, may be in a battle to survive, but it could be a winner when it comes to naming a state butterfly.

If it were up to a precocious fourth-grade student in Westchester County, the quarter-size butterfly would win the competition hands down.

"By adopting the Karner blue as state butterfly, more people will

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become aware of the dangers that the Karner blue faces," writes Karina Franke on her Web page.

"The more people who are aware, the more likely that people will support actions to protect the Karner," she writes.

Franke is encouraging her fellow elementary school students across the state to vote for the Karner blue butterfly later this fall from a list of

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PHOTOS PROVIDED

Others in the running to be named state butterfly include, clockwise from top left, the black swallowtail, Milbert's tortoiseshell, the mourning cloak and the red spotted purple.

Contest

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five butterflies nominated by entomologists.

A downstate assemblywoman, Sandra Galef, D-Ossining, has created a competition in which third-, fourth- and fifth-graders throughout the state vote from a list of five butterflies common in New York.

The other butterfly candidates are the black swallowtail, Milbert's tortoiseshell, mourning cloak and the red spotted purple or white admiral (same butterfly, different colors in different parts of state).

The vote will be taken on or before Election Day, Nov. 6. Galef will then draft legislation to have the winning butterfly voted on by the state Senate and Assembly to become the New York state butterfly.

New York has a state bird (the bluebird), a state flower (rose), a state mammal (beaver), even a state saltwater fish (striped bass), but no state butterfly.

Galef, a former teacher and a 15-year assemblywoman, said Karina Franke convinced her that New York should have a state butterfly as well as a state insect, which is the ladybug.

"A third-grader in my area wanted to name the Karner blue the state butterfly," Galef said Tuesday during a telephone interview from her office in Westchester County.

Galef said there was a contest that named the snapping turtle the state's official reptile, and she thought a similar contest was in order to name a butterfly.

So Galef consulted professionals at the Bronx Zoo and the Museum of Natural History and the state entomologist.

"Which butterflies are most prevalent in New York state?" she

asked the butterfly experts.

They selected the list of butterflies found in the state and displayed them on Galef's 90th Assembly District Web site.

She said the contest is a way of getting young people involved in the electoral process while learning about nature.

"They are being given the chance to get involved in the legislative process and have practical experience through this initiative," Galef said in a statement.

Assemblyman Roy J. McDonald, R-Saratoga, said he likes Galef's butterfly idea.

McDonald said if he were voting, there would be no question that the Karner blue butterfly would get his vote.

"It's a beautiful butterfly and very unique," McDonald said on Tuesday. He said that in this way, the butterfly is very much like New York state, especially upstate New York.

When he was Wilton town supervisor, McDonald was instrumental in creating the Wilton Wildlife Preserve and Park. One of the main reasons for the preserve and park, which was started in 1996, is to protect the Karner blue butterfly population found in Wilton.

The preserve also encourages expansion of the habitat of the Karner blue, which is on both the state and national endangered species lists.

Wilton, The Nature Conservancy, Saratoga County and the state have together protected nearly 2,000 acres of land on the east side of the Northway in Wilton as open space for the butterfly.

Volunteers and park staff plant blue lupine plants on a regular basis at the Wilton preserve. The butterflies rely on blue lupines for their survival.

The same type of protection and encouragement is given to the Karner blue butterfly in Albany's Pine Bush area.