



Connect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, in your community and how you can get involved.



Go Native Erie events lined up at TREC

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

In the U.S., beehives are transported around the country to pollinate commercially important crops. Because the bees are limited to only one type of pollen to eat — for example, a plantation of almond trees — it can have severe consequences for bee health and crop yields. This decline in biodiversity demonstrates the economic value of healthy ecosystems.

While the economic value of pollination is often credited entirely to honeybees, bumblebees and several other wild bee species and insects are actually much more effective pollinators of crops that include field beans, clover, tomatoes and apples.

Research by French scientists suggests the decline of honeybees seen in many countries may be caused by reduced plant diversity. Scientists found that bees fed pollen from a variety of plants showed signs of having a healthier immune system than those eating pollen from a single type. Both farmers and those in urban settings can help conserve and restore high quality habitats, which will in turn increase the number of valuable wild pollinators.

Learn more at the following Go Native Erie events:

May 27 to June 22, “Native and Invasive Plants of Erie County” exhibit,



ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

A renewed focus on native plants and “wild pollinators” could ease the global threat to the pollination of flowers and food crops caused by the decline in honeybee colonies.

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, Tom Ridge Environmental Center, second floor.

May 30, 10 a.m., TREC native garden tour. No fee/registration; meet at TREC front desk.

June 6, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., TREC garden native plant sale. Choose from native perennials, trees and shrubs.

June 15-21, National Pollinator Week Celebration at TREC. Daily speakers, workshops, children’s activities, wine-tasting event, Disney nature movie.

ANNA McCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jen Salem, the Go Native Erie coordinator, teaches gardeners about the importance of growing native plants. She also offers a free Selling Natives Kit for local nurseries and garden centers so they can educate their customers and help promote native plants. To learn more, contact her at gonativeerie@gmail.com.

Obligated to pollinate

Why butterflies, bees depend on native species

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

You have probably heard that monarch butterflies and bees are declining.

But do you know why or understand the consequences and what you can do about it?

Jen Salem, garden coordinator at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center, created Go Native Erie to help you answer these questions. The Regional Science Consortium secured Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding for the program but its success is up to the Erie community.

Conversion of prairies into cropland, the increasing use of pesticide-resistant crops and nonnative plant use in gardens and the development of green spaces have greatly reduced native plants. Over

the past decades, this loss of native plant communities has led to wildlife habitat loss, erosion, reduced genetic diversity, threats to important food crops that need pollinators and a disconnect between people and the land.

Salem’s goal is to connect people and involve them in solutions to these problems.

“Native plants have evolved to form complex and essential relationships with other living things. The monarch butterfly, for example, needs milkweed as a food source (nectar) and a host plant for their eggs and caterpillars. We can plant milkweed and other native plants to support pollinators like monarchs and native bees, and birds and other wildlife that depend on them,” said Salem.

Native plant species are the basis for supporting a healthy native ecosystem because they provide food, homes and shelter for native insect, bird and mammal populations. Using them in your garden is rewarding and easy because native plants are hardy to our climate, use no supplemental water once established and can grow in poor soils. When you choose native plants, you can conserve water and eliminate fertilizer and chemical use while beautifying your garden with carefree growers that also tolerate neglect. But the real benefit is to insect, bird and animal populations and people.

Salem also wants garden businesses and other groups to get involved. She has a free Selling Natives Kit available for local

nurseries and garden centers so they can educate their customers and help promote growing native plants. Project managers of public green spaces, including schools, parks, recreation areas and businesses, should also contact her for a list of plants that she will be distributing for Erie County projects.

“People are really becoming aware of environmental issues, like the plight of pollinators, and are willing to take action. My goal is to help them,” she said.

Contact Salem at 833-7424 or trecgarden@hotmail.com

ANNA McCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



MARTI MARTZ/Contributed photo

David Boughton, Pennsylvania Sea Grant maritime education specialist, shows students invasive species that threaten Lake Erie and other waterways.

OLCS students show benefits of S.T.E.M.

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Our Lady’s Christian School got their families and the community involved in science, technology, engineering and math by hosting a S.T.E.M. fair to show how S.T.E.M. is used in their daily lives and work.

Representatives from Asbury Woods, Allegheny College, Mercyhurst Preparatory School, AirBorn Inc., Plastek Group, LECOM Safe Kids, Go Native Erie, Regional Science Consortium, PA Sea Grant, Penn State Behrend Engineering, GE Transportation, Experience Children’s Museum, Audubon Society, A.N.N.A. Shelter and Environment Erie shared displays and activities.

Education majors from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania judged science fair projects from grades 4-6 for prizes. Second graders teamed up with fifth graders for a

recycling project. Seventh graders helped with setup and planning.

“The fair turned out really great,” said Nicole Fuhrman, the fifth- and sixth-grade science teacher. Fuhrman is one of eight teachers participating in the Pennsylvania Sea Grant Great Lakes, Great Stewards project, which provides funding and support for field trips and stewardship activities through the Center for Great Lakes Literacy (CGLL), a partnership of the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes National Program office. For more information about CGLL, contact Marti Martz at mam60@psu.edu or 217-9011, extension 104.

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JEN SALEM/Contributed photo

Scientists worry that human activity is leading to the endangerment or extinction of monarch butterflies. Planting milkweed can help them bounce back.



ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Black-eyed Susan is a great native plant for beginning gardeners because it is easy to grow and attracts many types of pollinators.



LARRY MASTER, WWW.MASTERIMAGES.ORG

Bee balm (Monarda) is used to attract hummingbirds, pollinating insects and insects that control garden pests.



ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Serviceberry trees produce edible fruit loved by birds and people.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

- www.regsciconsort.com/research/go-native-erie/
- www.facebook.com/gonativeerie
- www.monarchwatch.org
- www.paseagrant.org

How would a lack of biodiversity affect the type of foods you eat or the type of clothes that you wear? Look for newspaper articles that include information about the benefits of biodiversity. Try to find examples of how biodiversity positively affects sports and play, cultural traditions, medical advances and ecosystems.

Then think about if we are doing enough to maintain biodiversity in the world. What one thing can you do to ensure that today’s plant and animal species remain in place for future generations? What can others do?

