

Outdoor Recreation *is* Outdoor Education

Pollinators are essential to healthy ecosystems and are equally important to many crops for humans, including plant products, from the apples and almonds we eat to fibers for our clothes.

But what are pollinators? Pollinators are animal species that spread pollen from flower to flower, fertilizing them. You may know of bees and butterflies as pollinators, but there are other insects like moths, and even vertebrates like birds, bats and lizards.

The animals aren't visiting plants to pollinate them; they're there for food. And in the process of feeding on plant nectar (sweet, sugar-rich "plant juice"), pollen gets stuck on the visitor. As that animal travels to other flowers, it inadvertently carries pollen on its body and fertilizes flowers as it goes. Without fertilization, many plants wouldn't produce a seed or delicious fruit and vegetables around their seeds. Without a means of reproduction (seeds), many plants - and much of our fresh food source - would be in trouble.



Photo courtesy of the USDA

Long-term studies are showing an alarming downward trend in the number of pollinators, which is bad news for us and the ecosystems in which we live. Contributing to this decrease are invasive plant species, broad-spectrum pesticide use (insect control chemicals designed to manage a wide variety of organisms), diseases and climate change.

What can we do to help?



Make your property "pollinator-friendly:" Leave native plant species to grow, if possible. Plant flowers that are attractants to things like bees, butterflies, moths and hummingbirds. Avoid outdoor pesticide use that would affect these animals.

Here are some garden ideas to benefit pollinators from the Natural Resources Conservation Service: www.shorturl.at/gkqAJ

And here is a guide to native New Mexico bees from New Mexico State University: www.shorturl.at/INPRW



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