

Pollinator Protection Act Update

When the Connecticut Act Concerning Pollinator Health became law in 2016, it was hailed as groundbreaking legislation, not only because it provided comprehensive strategies to protect pollinators, but also because it passed unanimously in both the House and Senate, a rare occurrence.

The law required a number of studies and reports on various aspects of the problem including the use of dangerous pesticides, loss of habitat, varroa mites, and increased state involvement. Now many of those strategies are being rolled out by various state agencies, some actually ahead of established deadlines. While not perfect, these strategies, if implemented properly, should go a long way in making a difference to the health of Connecticut's bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Some of the resulting actions and reports which have already been published include:

Neonicotinoids are reclassified as restricted use only. (*Background: Neonicotinoids are a class of widely-used pesticides which are toxic to bees and other pollinators. Until now they have been distributed in a variety of ways and products easily available to the public.*)

With the new classification as "restricted use" they will be available only to certified commercial and private applicators. The date for this reclassification was specified January 1, 2018 but the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) actually moved this date forward by one year.

Neonicotinoids excluded on plants in bloom. As of 2016 no neonicotinoids are to be applied to plants which are in blossom (except in a greenhouse which is inaccessible to pollinators. (As specified in the legislation).

Establishment of a Pollinator Advisory Committee. The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station shall establish a Pollinator Advisory Committee to serve as an information resource for the General Assembly. That committee has been established. Members are Dr. Richard Cowles (CAES), Mr. Mark Creighton, State Beekeeper (CAES), Mr. Nelson DeBarros (DEEP), Dr. Kirby Stafford III, State Entomologist (CAES), and Dr. Kimberly Stoner (CAES).

Study of varroa mites. By January 1, 2017 the State Entomologist shall make recommendations to offsetting the effects of varroa mites. (*Background: Varroa mites were first found in Connecticut in the early 1990's and by 2007 were found in virtually all inspected colonies.*)

The published guide for recommendations for control can be found at:

http://www.ct.gov/caes/lib/caes/documents/publications/pollinators/state_entomologist_report_varroa_mite-pollinator_health_act.pdf.

CAES shall compile a citizen's guide to model pollinator habitat by January 1, 2017.

(Background: Much of the decline of pollinators in Connecticut is due to loss of habitat from development, natural plant succession, pesticide usage and changes in the way agriculture is carried out.)

This 26-page report has been issued and contains sections on developing pollinator habitats for beekeepers, farmers and orchardists, managers of large land areas, and gardeners. Each section is complete with references and suggested plants. This guide can be found at

http://www.ct.gov/caes/lib/caes/documents/publications/pollinators/a_citizen's_guide_to_creating_pollinator_habitat_in_connecticut.pdf

DOT to identify opportunities for planting native grasses along highways by January 1, 2017.

(Background: In total, over 10 million acres of roadsides exist in the United States. Roadsides represent one of the most widespread networks of linear habitats on earth, acting as corridors for species distribution by connecting fragmented existing landscape patches. This land supports a diversity of wildlife by providing shelter, food, and breeding opportunities for many species, including presently threatened pollinators.)

The Department of Transportation has issued an extensive report concerning replacement of native grasses with native plant communities along highways to create model pollinator habitat. It contains much valuable information for local highway departments and others to begin this process. Of note are over 100 pages of pictures and specifications for native plants. This report can be found at <http://nenativeplants.uconn.edu/references.php>.

By March 1, 2017 the DEEP shall report on restrictions on the planting of seeds coated with neonicotinoids. *(Background: The main concern about seeds coated with neonicotinoids is acute exposure to bees from airborne dust associated with the planting process. Other concerns are chronic exposure to foraging bees from nectar, pollen and plant guttation as these are transported back to the hive.)*

That resulting report offers information and alternatives to farmers and can be found at: http://www.ct.gov/caes/lib/caes/documents/publications/pollinators/best_management_practices_for_handling_seeds_treated_with_neonicotinoid_insecticides.pdf.

Connecticut can be proud of our leaders who have taken significant steps to address the serious decline of pollinators in our state. However, it will be important that citizens also take steps in their own yards and communities to promote pollinator habitat by planting native species (bees after all co-evolved with native plants) and limiting or eliminating the use of harmful pesticides. We know that pollinators are a keystone species which support not only agricultural pursuits but also whole ecosystems. Without them the world would be a very different place.