



September 2019

**Kenneth Miller, A Young
Advocate for Pollinators**



As part of the celebration of National Pollinator Week, Protect Our Pollinators sponsors a challenge for Newtown's elementary students to draw or write about their favorite pollinator. The submissions every year have been truly wonderful. This year brought a bumper crop of outstanding work, some having 3-dimensional flowers and grass, some whimsical creations, some very life-like depictions, and one collage of beautiful photographs which showed all the pollinators as well as the children who put this together.

Of particular note however was a poem written by 8-year-old Kenneth Miller, "Pollinators Around the World". Through his research Kenneth had discovered a number of pollinators not ordinarily found in Connecticut, such as Australia's honey possum and Madagascar's black and white lemur. Kenneth decided to write a poem about these creatures and ended the piece with "For all that they are worth, please protect our pollinators all over the earth!"

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Pollinator Pathway Project – Providing Healthy Yards and Public Spaces

A Pollinator Pathway is a pesticide-free corridor of public and private properties that provide native plant habitat and nutrition for pollinators. Chemical-free yards and public spaces not only help preserve our pollinators but can also protect the health of our families and our pets.

We need our Pollinators. When it comes to pollination, introduced European honey bees most often come to mind, however there are over 340 species of bees native to Connecticut and over 400 species native to New York. Native bees pollinate 80% of our flowering trees, shrubs and plants and are also important to our farms and orchards. These native bees play a vital role in pollinating the plants in our gardens and in our communities. For instance, our native bumble bee (*Bombus*) is a highly effective pollinator due to a specialized adaptation called "buzz pollination" which allows the bee to shake pollen loose. Only bumble bees have the ability to pollinate tomato, pepper and eggplant. Squash bees (*Peponapis*) pollinate plants in the cucurbit family which includes cucumber, gourd, melon and pumpkin. Our fruit trees are pollinated by several species of native bees. Just 250 orchard bees (*Osmia*) can pollinate an acre of apple blossoms as efficiently as 40,000 honeybees.

Pollinator populations are in decline primarily due to 1) widespread application of pesticides on lawns, gardens and in agriculture and 2) development and land fragmentation resulting in loss of floral resources, shelter and nesting sites. Bee populations of both native and honey bees have seen sharp declines in recent years. Monarch butterflies have declined by 95% in the last two decades and there is a downward trend in all butterfly and beneficial insect populations. It is important to note that our very existence depends on the pollination services of insects. (continued on page 2)

Organic Pesticides – Not Always Safe for Bees and Other Beneficial Insects

The term organic pesticides is somewhat misleading in that all pesticides are designed to kill something. And the fact that it may be organic (naturally occurring or derived from natural sources) does not mean that it is safe for all pollinators or other beneficial insects.

It is true that most organic pesticides are less toxic and do break down more quickly than synthetic chemicals. However, some toxic effects may occur from organic pesticides. These effects may be either 1) immediate through direct exposure or 2) delayed through contact with residues or contaminated pollen brought into the hive or nest.

Of particular concern is soil drench (as might be done for spraying for ticks) since 70% of native bees are ground dwellers.

Many organic pesticides have never been tested for effects on bees. Any testing which has been done on bees usually involves adult honey bees only (not native bees). Also, testing of multiple pesticides which may be encountered in near-by sites has not been done.

So what should you do? Prevention is the key using an IPM (Integrated Pest Management) approach which requires that chemical choices will be made only after all alternative strategies have been exhausted. If organic pesticides are to be used, steps should be taken to reduce both the degree of toxicity and the level of exposure, including things like choice of application methods, drift protection, timing, buffers, etc.

(continued on page 2)

Kenneth Miller (continued)

Not only did Kenneth write this poem, but he also drew two pictures, one of a beautiful Monarch butterfly with the caption, “Thank You Butterfly.” The other one which is Kenneth’s personal favorite, depicts a bumble bee with the caption “Don’t be a buzz kill!”

Kenneth’s passion for pollinators started at age 6 when he began educating himself and sharing his knowledge with his family. He encouraged his Mom to start gardening and they have since planted five mini gardens to attract pollinators, some using seeds from the Booth Library’s Seed Bank. No pesticides are used in their gardens which Kenneth knows could be harmful to the pollinators.

Kenneth is also involved at Sandy Hook School where he participates in the school garden project, which has continued into the summer.

We at Protect Our Pollinators are so impressed with the work and dedication of this youngster who is an inspiration to us all. Go Kenneth! You have a great future ahead of you!



Newtown Labor Day Parade



Scouts plant at Cherry Grove

Organic Pesticides (continued)

Some of these precautions can be found on product labels. However, keep in mind that limited testing may have been used to generate these label directions. Erring on the side of caution may help you sleep better at night! It is important to be informed and to read and follow all labels and directions carefully.

For a list of organic pesticides and their limitations please see the hand-out “Organic Pesticides: Minimizing Risks to Pollinators” at propollinators.org.

– Mary Wilson

Pollinator Pathway Project (continued)

Pollinator Pathways are helping pollinators. Pathways are typically organized by volunteers and town conservation organizations working together to establish continuous corridors of pollinator-friendly habitat. Pesticide-free nesting sites and food sources for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinating insects and wildlife are critical. Native bees, our most important pollinators, forage close to home with a range of only about 750 meters so connecting properties to create a “pathway” is the project’s focus. The Pathway project began in Wilton, CT just two years ago. Since that time, pathways have been established in over 75 towns in CT and NY and the list is rapidly growing.

Homeowners and landowners are encouraged to join the Pollinator Pathway in their town. To register your property, visit www.pollinator-pathway.org to find your town listing. If a Pathway has not been initiated in your town? Find out how to get started at info@pollinator-pathway.org.

Newtown Pollinator Pathway

On April 7th, Protect Our Pollinators hosted a Kickoff event to introduce the Newtown Pollinator Pathway. Presenters included Emily May, Pollination Conservation Specialist, Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation, Lisa Turoczi, owner, Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery, Mary Ellen Lemay, facilitator for the Hudson to Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership (H2H), and Louise Washer, director of the Norwalk River Watershed Association. Both Mary Ellen and Louise continue to be instrumental in advancing the Pathway project throughout the region.

The Newtown event was hugely successful with a packed house which included members of the Newtown Pathway Steering Committee, First Selectman Dan Rosenthal, Newtown Conservation Commission, Newtown Forest Association (NFA), Newtown Environmental Action Team (NEAT), Garden Club of Newtown, Newtown Horticulture Club and many town residents.

Since April, many landowners have registered properties on the Newtown Pathway. And, public Pathway gardens have also been established and renewed at the Fairfield Hills Fruit Trail, Barb’s Trail Garden on Dickenson Trail, NFA’s Schoolhouse Foundation Garden at Cherry Grove, and NFA headquarters at Holcomb Hill Preserve. This fall, another pollinator garden will be planted at the Newtown Animal Shelter. Work will also begin at the Municipal Center for Tammy’s Garden, honoring a beloved member of the town Planning and Zoning department.

If you have some free time to volunteer and would like to help maintain gardens, please contact us at Propollinators@gmail.com.

- Polly B.

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