

Conservation Corner

By Corinne Peterson
Pocahontas County Naturalist



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Conservation would like to thank everyone who took part in the 33rd Annual Wiegert Prairie Fall Fest on August 28. We appreciate each one of you! Check out the Current Events page on our website for photos and a recap of this special day and place where we can pause in our busy lives to relive and remember our family, farming, educational, faith, and natural heritage.

This year during the prairie rides we tagged and released several Monarch Butterflies as part of the University of Kansas Monarch Watch Program. As you may remember, the summer of 2015 produced a strong fall migration. Unfortunately, data collected so far this year points to yet another significant decline in monarch numbers. And while winter storms and spring weather conditions impacted this year's spring migration, loss of habitat remains the main factor in the overall decline of monarch numbers.

Loss of habitat, of course, includes not only the number of acres but also the quality of those acres. On Friday, August 26, Gov. Mark Dayton of Minnesota issued broad new guidelines designed to restrict the use of neonicotinoids, a class of insecticides that has been implicated in the decline of honeybees and other pollinators. Under the new guidelines, farmers and nursery owners who want to use neonicotinoids will have to prove to the Department of Agriculture that they face imminent danger of significant crop loss without them. Many experts believe these guidelines will make Minnesota the leading state in pollinator protection efforts.

University of Minnesota Professor Maria Spivak, one of the world's top pollinator researchers, praised the announcement. "Our honeybees, our hundreds of species of native bees, our monarch butterflies, all of them need our help. They need good, clean flowers to support their nutrition, and when they have good nutrition, they're able to pollinate the fruits and vegetables which in turn support our nutrition. We need each other."

By now, I'm sure many of you have questions. What are neonicotinoids? Why are they a risk to bees and other pollinators? How can we help?

Neonicotinoids are systemic chemicals that are absorbed by the plant and dispersed throughout the plant tissues, including pollen and nectar. They target nerve impulses in insects and affect both destructive and beneficial insects. Two common ingredients in garden insecticides, imidacloprid and clothianidin, may linger in the soil for months or even years.

Pollinators are exposed in many ways including contact with spray residue on plants or by eating toxic leaves, pollen, or nectar. Even small amounts used by backyard gardeners adversely affect pollinators. In bumblebees, low doses slow colony growth and reproduction while in honeybees low doses impair their ability to fly, navigate, and forage for food that could contribute to "colony collapse."

Everyone can help! Plant and preserve native habitat that is pollinator friendly. Avoid neonicotinoids in your garden or yard. Learn more about pollinators and then share the information with your friends and neighbors. Together we can help conserve the "pollinator piece" of our natural heritage.



Monarch nectaring on hyssop at St. Peter's Butterfly Garden.