

## Community blogs

# Greening Our Community – Pollinators Need our Protection

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Priscilla Hudson

Over the last number of years many published reports about endangered pollinators have focused on honey bees since they benefit us more economically than some of the others. But all pollinators have been affected and are in serious decline.

One such pollinator is the Monarch butterfly, a species that we should take special interest in since our area is on their migratory route. What we do — or fail to do — could mean their demise as a species: Read “Monarch Butterflies in North America Found to be Vulnerable to Extinction” at <http://www.xerces.org/2015/03/10/monarch-butterflies-in-north-america-found-to-be-vulnerable-to-extinction/>.

Map of monarch migration patterns:

[https://www.learner.org/north/images/graphics/monarch/migration\\_map\\_xerxes.jpg](https://www.learner.org/north/images/graphics/monarch/migration_map_xerxes.jpg)

Just as flowers require visits from pollinators to perpetuate their species, pollinators require the nectar and pollen provided by the flowering plant for their food. Eleanor Dietrich, along with a group of dedicated people with the Magnolia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and the Florida Panhandle Wildflower Alliance, have been working diligently with the Florida Department of Transportation to reduce mowing alongside our state roads to allow flowers to bloom and pollinators to forage. Although great strides have been made, municipalities such as Liberty County continue to mow along their roads just as these flowers are coming into bloom because they prefer a more manicured roadside.

Unfortunately for migrating pollinators, mowed roadsides are experienced as a food desert, with nothing to sustain them in their travels. Practices like this, although giving a neater, more manicured look to the human eye, are the death knell to pollinators such as the Monarch, which depend on these flowering plants as their food supply. The only way changes will be made to practices such as this is for citizens to remind the decision makers that these are important issues and it matters how they are handled. If not, we

## About The Author



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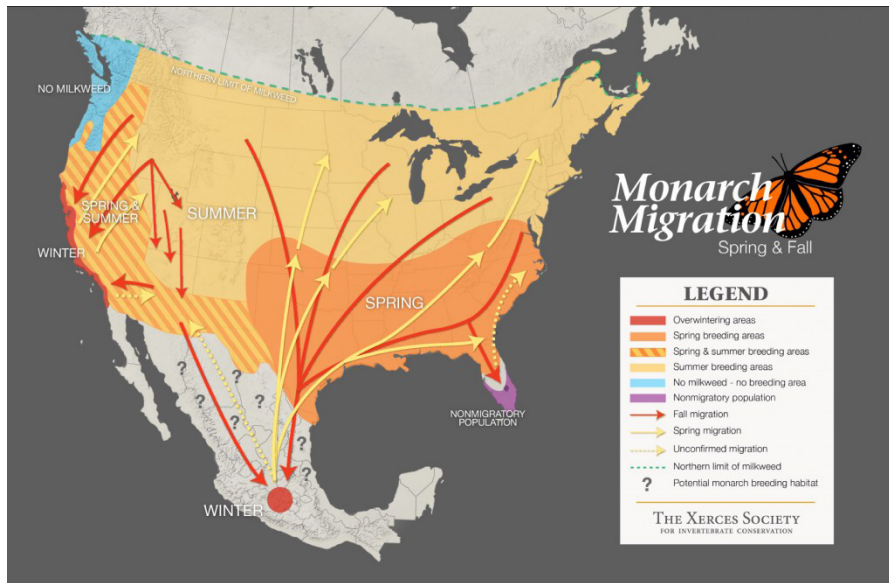
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could lose iconic species such as the Monarch and those that depend upon these flowers for their foraging needs simply because of our aesthetic sensibilities.

Having endured a Tallahassee spring with thick clouds of pollen in the air covering everything in sight, one might wonder at the need for pollinators at all. Surely with this heavy coating of pollen things are getting pollinated, right? Well, yes. But pollen spread by the wind is what sets off spring allergies — pine pollen, for instance. The pollination that is really important to us, the one that ensures our continued food supply, is dependent upon pollinators such as honey bees.

According to Greenpeace, “Honey bees – wild and domestic – perform about 80 percent of all pollination worldwide. A single bee colony can pollinate 300 million flowers each day. Grains are primarily pollinated by the wind, but the best and healthiest food – fruits, nuts, and vegetables – are pollinated by bees. **Seventy out of the top 100 human food crops, which supply about 90 percent of the world’s nutrition, are pollinated by bees.**” (<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/en/campaigns/genetic-engineering/Bees-in-Crisis/>)

Overuse of pesticides in the environment, both by home and commercial applicators, is one of the problems affecting our pollinators. Although dependent upon time of day, rate, and method of application, all pesticides have the potential to be harmful to pollinators. Systemic insecticides, which the plant uptakes and spreads through its tissues, are being found in the pollen and nectar and have received significant attention in the role of pollinator decline.

Many homeowners are contributing to this problem unaware, by purchasing plants that have been treated with these pesticides and planting them in their home garden. Recently Lowe’s announced that it will be phasing out plants that are treated with neonicotinoids, which have been found to adversely affect pollinators. While other retailers are sure to follow suit, especially with demand by consumers, it’s up to the individual to be conscious and aware of whether the plants and practices in his or her yard are helping or hurting local pollinators.

With so much of our food supply dependent upon pollination from bees it would serve us

well to better care for those that care for us. For more information and ways that you can help make a difference, including participating in citizen science projects to track the health and well-being of pollinators in your area, look to the Great Sunflower Project (<https://www.greatsunflower.org/>) and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (<http://www.xerces.org/>) for tips, planting guides, and other information to support the pollinators that make our lives better in so many ways.

**Priscilla Hudson is a home gardener, hobby beekeeper, permaculture practitioner and winner of an Aveeno grant to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators. Contact her at [tlhgardener@gmail.com](mailto:tlhgardener@gmail.com). “Greening Our Community” articles are brought to you by the Capital Area Sustainability Council (CASC), a forum organized by Sustainable Tallahassee. The Council rotates the content of these articles among its members. Learn more at [www.SustainableTallahassee.org/CASC](http://www.SustainableTallahassee.org/CASC).**

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