



“Currents” February 2025

The Power of Pollinators

Pollinators play a vital role in ecosystems all over the world. Birds, butterflies, and bees are the most thought of pollinators, but there are species of moths, wasps, flies, beetles, and bats that pollinate as well. Pollinators stay busy since up to 80% of all plant species need to be pollinated, including three quarters of the world’s most common human food crops.

The work of pollinators is critical to most of the plant growth on our planet. Without 80% of plants, our environment, including the river, would function much differently. Plants provide habitat and food to wildlife, including aquatic species. Vegetation also builds soil and increases the land’s ability to capture water. Both of these actions improve river health by reducing erosion and slowing down overland rain flows improving water quality and quantity. Pollinators help ensure vegetation in riparian areas stays healthy and diverse. The riparian area is the dense band of native vegetation surrounding rivers and creeks that supports and protects the waterway. Without pollinators, our riparian areas would be bare, and the Guadalupe River would not be as healthy and beautiful as it is.

Most of the pollination is done by insects, and the state insect of Texas is one of our most iconic pollinators, the monarch butterfly. Monarch butterflies are divided by the Rocky Mountains into eastern and western populations. The eastern population spends their summers in the Midwest and Northeastern U.S. and migrates to Mexico for winter. In spring, the eastern monarchs start their voyage north and stop in the Southeastern U.S. to lay their eggs. Their stop includes much of Texas and the milkweed plant population of our state is incredibly important to their reproductive capacity. Eggs are laid on milkweed plants and the caterpillars, once hatched, will only eat milkweed. While there are many species of milkweed they enjoy, three of their preferred Texas species can be found in Kerr County and include green milkweed, antelope horns milkweed, and zizotes milkweed. Unfortunately, the number of monarchs gracing our skies has been decreasing over time. Since the 1990s, the monarch population has decreased by about 90%. There are several factors contributing to their decline including habitat loss, parasites, and getting struck by cars.

Luckily, there are many ways to help the pollinators in your own backyard. Planting a pollinator garden composed of native, drought-tolerant plants is an aesthetically pleasing option. You can provide water sources in sunny areas either in shallow dishes or by creating a muddy depression. Bee boxes, wood piles, and leaf litter can serve as shelter and habitat during winter. Finally, the easiest option is to stop using insecticides and pesticides. Save time and money knowing that you’re helping your local pollinators! The UGRA building is surrounded by an educational landscape that includes a pollinator garden maintained by local Master Naturalists. We invite you to take a self-guided tour and visit our website at www.ugra.org/major-initiatives/eduscape for resources including a native plant list compiled by the Kerrville Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas.

Let’s Keep Our River Clean

Shelby Taber, Natural Resources Manager for UGRA, staber@ugra.org or (830) 896-5445