

News for Immediate Release



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Torstenson Youth Center A-buzz for Pollinators

PECATONICA, IL – The stage has been set for the Illinois Conservation Foundation’s Torstenson Youth Conservation Education Center to become a haven for pollinators—and educators and students interested in bees, butterflies and bats.

Utilizing grants from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources’ Wildlife Preservation Fund and Monsanto, hundreds of native pollinator-friendly flowers have been planted adjacent to the Torstenson Center’s Learning Center. This pollinator garden will complement a 3-acre pollinator field planted in 2013 in conjunction with the Pheasants Forever National Mentor Convention held at the Center.

“The importance of pollinators makes a tremendous learning opportunity for students of all ages,” explained Tom Hoffman, Education Director at the Winnebago County facility. “Regardless of age, everyone should understand the role of insects and bats in pollinating what is estimated to be between 75 and 90 percent of the world’s food supplies.”

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The demonstration gardens are available for school groups to observe and inventory insects, and the Learning Center has butterfly nets, identification books, binoculars and insectaria (insect houses) available to assist educators in planning their lessons. School visitors, as well as youth group members and the general public, can learn how to create a native pollinator garden, and recognize the importance of selecting native species over introduced, exotic plants that may become problematic in the future.

Eric Schmidt, Illinois Conservation Foundation Executive Director, is appreciative of the financial sponsors, and of the community support for development of the garden.

“Area students have had the opportunity to get their hands dirty and help set nearly 525 plants in the ground,” Schmidt explained. “Throughout the next few years, management of the plot will be through weeding, which provides an excellent opportunity to teach plant identification skills. Pecatonica High School students are assisting in the construction and placement of bat houses, hanging houses for native bees and a bee hive. Phillip Raines, a local beekeeper, has embraced the pollinator demonstration garden project and is serving as a technical consultant on construction of bee structures. When appropriate weather arrives, he will be donating a colony of bees.”

Educators and youth group leaders interested in scheduling a field trip to the Torstenson Youth Conservation Education Center, located southwest of Rockford near Pecatonica, should contact Tom Hoffman at (815) 985-6926.

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