



Press Release

Rare Species show value of Pollinator Habitat Sites in Guelph - Tying together World Habitat Day and World Animal Day

For Immediate Release October 3, 2023

Pollination Guelph is using the occurrence of World Habitat Day (Oct 2) and World Animal Day (Oct 4) to highlight the value of pollinator habitat and announce the discovery of several rare species at our pollinator habitat sites in Guelph.

While the effects of climate change, wildfires, floods, and diseases on our human society are some of the many topics on people's minds right now, there is much less awareness and concern about the health and availability of habitat for plants, pollinators, and the other species that rely on them. Pollination Guelph is a volunteer-run charitable organization that has been working since 2008 to increase pollinator habitat with planting projects, big and small.

The Eastview Pollinator Park, located on the former Eastview landfill site in the east end of the City of Guelph, is a 45hectare grassland site that Pollination Guelph volunteers have been managing with the City for optimal habitat. As the area surrounding it transitions from farm fields and meadows to subdivisions, animals are increasingly discovering the site and calling it home.

Researchers and volunteers have been conducting regular bird and pollinator surveys of the site and over the years have noted multiple species at risk, including the American Bumble Bee, Yellow-banded Bumble Bee, Monarch, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and Barn Swallow, as well as other declining species. Many migratory birds are also regular users of the site, as are countless other birds, bees, butterflies, flies, and other wildlife.

The most exciting observation occurred in 2022 with the discovery of a Henslow's Sparrow singing at the site over multiple days in the spring. This Endangered species is extremely rare in Ontario, with only 34 10kmx10km landscape grids with occurrences in the last 20 years and 69 observations since 2008 (as of 2021). Due to its rarity and the massive attention by bird enthusiasts this finding would have resulted in, volunteers were not allowed to announce the discovery until this fall.



1. Woman observing the at-risk yellow-banded bumble bee temporarily captured by researchers at the Eastview Pollinator Park. Photo by Victoria MacPhail.



2 Henslow's Sparrow (stock photo): this Endangered species was found at the Eastview Pollinator Park in 2022. Photo by Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

"I first heard the bird singing while I was out doing a yearly survey and I couldn't believe it! It was one of those once in a lifetime events. I recorded the song and continued to monitor the site for the next few weeks. The bird sang from the same location for over a week, putting it in the category of "probable" for the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. It was beyond exciting, especially knowing that it chose a restored grassland site within the city limits". - Chris Earley, Interpretive Biologist at the University of Guelph Arboretum and volunteer with Pollination Guelph

"The fact that this bird chose the Eastview Pollinator Park as a breeding territory out of all the locations in southern Ontario it could have shows the value of the grassland there, and the value of preserving, restoring, or creating habitats even within city boundaries". - Victoria MacPhail, Co-Chair of Pollination Guelph

"The Eastview Pollinator Park is a real oasis in the City. In the late summer when the grass is tall, you can hardly imagine you are still in the City when you walk through the site. It's full of bird song and insect life" - Victoria MacPhail

While the site itself is not open to the general public, Pollination Guelph does give tours, and the site is also visible through the chain link fence. However, it's not the only site that Pollination Guelph has been involved with.

The Clair Road Emergency Services Centre site was once surrounded by dead and dying turf, but Pollination Guelph has steadily been working to convert it to a drought-tolerant meadow. It is open to the public, with short trails winding through it, and it is highly visible from the adjacent Clair Road.

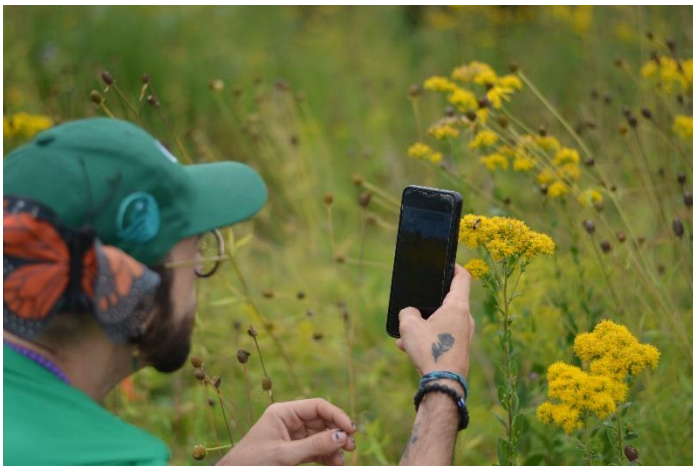
The Gosling Pollinator Garden at Hospice Wellington, designed and maintained by volunteers with Pollination Guelph at the corner of Scottsdale and Kortright, is a great example of how native plants, that support pollinating insects, can be used in urban landscaping for businesses and homes. Staff, clients, and visitors enjoy the beauty the full season of bloom that the plants provide, as well as the winter colours and textures, and all the wildlife visitors. In addition, a swale in front of Alectra's Guelph offices is now filled with pollinator habitat, thanks to Pollination Guelph volunteers, with support from Alectra.



3 Yellow-banded bumble bee being released after surveys, at Eastview Pollinator Park. Photo by Victoria MacPhail.

As a result of Pollination Guelph's outreach and education work, many other patches of habitat have been created by the City, community groups, and community members. However, Pollination Guelph knows a lot less about the animal visitors to those areas, and is calling on members of the public to help fill in the gap.

"Anyone with a camera can take photos of the plants, birds, and insects they see at any of our planting sites or other areas in the City, upload them to iNaturalist.org via a phone app or a website, and have the species identified by other naturalists. Plus all observations are automatically added to Pollination Guelph's Projects on iNaturalist, giving us a better understanding of the impact of these areas of habitat." – Lorne Widmer, Pollination Guelph Board Member



4 Volunteer using iNaturalist to id a pollinator and plant at the Clair Road Emergency Services Centre habitat site. Photo by Jessica Tan.

"In just five hours last September, six volunteers from the Canadian Conservation Corps Guelph Flex Team made 640 observations to iNaturalist from the Hospice Wellington site, the Clair Road site, and a third site at Alectra Utilities. Species observed at each site totalled 155, 124 and 49 respectively. This is remarkable, given that each of these sites was almost entirely covered in sod just a few years ago." – Lorne Widmer

"The beauty of iNaturalist is that you don't need to know how to identify the species at all. Just take a photo, upload it to the website or submit it through the app, and volunteers will help to identify it for you. People are literally finding rare species and even new species all the time just by photographing the animals in their gardens or local parks, and the data is invaluable." – Victoria MacPhail

Pollination Guelph challenges everyone to take a walk on World Animal Day to see what wildlife they can find, and to give some thought to the habitats they require. For more information on how you can help pollinators, visit www.PollinationGuelph.ca.

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About Pollinators and Pollinator Decline

Pollinators are the animals that help more than 80% of all flowering plants reproduce through a process known as pollination. They primarily include bees, flies, butterflies, moths, beetles, and hummingbirds, and their daily work is essential for one of out every three bites of food we eat. Unfortunately, pollinator populations have declined drastically in recent years due to habitat loss, pesticide use, diseases and parasites, and climate change.

About Pollination Guelph

Pollination Guelph is a completely volunteer-run federally incorporated charitable organization. They formed in August 2008 to promote a better understanding of the importance of pollinators, to conserve and develop pollinator habitat and showcase pollinator projects to serve as a model for citizens and communities across Canada and internationally. These activities are accomplished through their goals of education, research, community outreach, advocacy, and conservation.

For more information, visit: www.pollinationguelph.ca.