

The Garden State Joins the Pollinator Pathway Movement

By David Wasmuth



The Northeast Earth Coalition (NEEC), based in Montclair, NJ, is excited to join with the Pollinator Pathway as its New Jersey partner to promote pollinator gardens in the Garden State. The NEEC is a volunteer-driven environmental non-profit. Its work ranges from developing pollinator gardens to managing community vegetable gardens to hosting an annual conference, Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World, each winter; the January 2020 Conference was the largest gathering of environmental activists ever in New Jersey. We are committed to working with other organizations with a similar focus on community-based environmental action.

The NEEC has its roots in the Montclair Backyard Habitat Project, which formed in 2004 with the goal of making Montclair a National Wildlife Federation (NWF)-certified

Community Wildlife Habitat. Community habitat status for a town of Montclair's size required 250 habitat certification points (one point for each home, three for each business, house of worship, or public area, 10 for each school).

A certified property is required to meet these five basic criteria for wildlife:

- **Food** – examples include high nectar flowers for pollinators and plants that produce seeds, nuts, or berries for birds and other wildlife
- **Water** – anything from a bird bath to rain garden to a stream or pond
- **Cover** – a wooded area, thick ground cover, rock wall, dense shrubs, etc.
- **Places to raise young** – host plants for pollinating insects, nesting boxes, mature trees, dense shrubs, etc.
- **Sustainable gardening practices** – lawn reduction, native plants, eliminating pesticide use, etc.

Our team of eight volunteers spread the word and educated the community with habitat tours of certified yards, tabling at environmental events, presentations for local organizations, and an annual Backyard Habitat Fair. In 2010, Montclair officially became the first NWF-community wildlife habitat in New Jersey. By then, nearly every school had a certified habitat, along with all of the major parks, several churches and synagogues, and over 100 homes. The number of NWF certifications has continued to grow since Montclair became a Community Habitat, with 211 homes, 16 schools, eight parks, and five houses of worship now certified as wildlife habitats. Publicity about the Backyard Habitat project had a spillover effect in neighboring towns, which also saw increased habitat certifications of homes and schools. Since the NWF habitat criteria overlap with those of the Pollinator Pathway, each of these properties is a potential Pollinators Pathway site.



While promoting the Montclair Habitat Project, our members developed working relationships with like-minded organizations and individuals in Montclair and beyond. These relationships provided the basis for the creation of the NEEC, which has subsumed the Backyard Habitat Project and expanded its range both geographically and thematically. We are currently connected with pollinator habitat projects in the nearby towns of Bloomfield, Totowa, Verona, Passaic, and Paterson.

The NEEC is involved in several ongoing projects to create pollinator gardens in local parks. Over the past three years, we have transformed Crane Park, a formerly neglected pocket park in the center of Montclair, into the site of a beautiful demonstration pollinator garden featuring over 70 different species of pollinator-attractive native plants. We are also involved in a restoration effort in a 2,000-square foot section of Essex County's Brookdale Park. Known as the Overlook Spring Pollinator Project, this project has seen the removal of dense growths of invasive mugwort, Asian shrub honeysuckle, and burdock and their replacement with appropriate pollinator-friendly natives – nearly 2,000 plants representing 34 native species have been planted there over the past 18 months. We are also working with the Friends of Watsessing Park in Bloomfield, NJ, in their project to develop pollinator gardens in that Essex County park.



Crane Park Pollinator Garden. See below for more about this sign.

With a successful record of promoting pollinator habitat and eco-friendly landscaping for over 15 years, the NEEC's volunteers are well placed to introduce the Pollinator Pathway to New Jersey. We are looking forward to working together to expand and connect pollinator corridors through northern New Jersey and beyond.

NEEC created this Crane Park Pollinator Garden sign to identify the plants that are growing in the garden and the pollinators that are visiting them. A QR code (lower left) connects visitors to educational information about pollinators and host plants. NEEC also provides a garden map so visitors can locate each plant in the garden.

