

DuPage Monarch Project:
Communities Protecting Pollinators

Annual Report
2023

*Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
River Prairie Group of the Illinois Sierra Club
The Conservation Foundation
Wild Ones Greater DuPage Chapter*



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Executive Summary

When the rusty-patched bumblebee was federally listed as endangered in 2017, little more was known about it other than there were alarmingly fewer of them. Honey bees had occupied press coverage for several years which generated a widespread and misplaced concern. Honey bees are commercially managed and neither endangered nor declining while our native bees are slipping away unnoticed.

More information about native bee habitat is essential for doing a better job of providing what they need. Pollinator habitat must have flowers with nectar and pollen but recent research found there are also tiny, barely noticeable flowers on trees that we've been missing.

In 2023, there was a focus on learning more about the value of trees for bees and sharing that information. *Meadows in the Sky for Bees and Butterflies*, a new brochure about the value of trees for pollinators, was developed. We recognized native trees as habitat and began tracking the number planted each year. DuPage County Environment and Sustainability Division was recognized for giving employees 600 free tree and shrub saplings as part of an Arbor Day celebration. The Elmhurst Cool Cities Coalition made progress advocating for native trees to be included as an option in the city's parkway tree program and a small step was taken to increase awareness of the value of oaks for pollinators with a book discussion of the Nature of Oaks by Doug Tallamy.

It was a good year for monarchs. They received a boost in awareness when the long awaited Illinois monarch license plate decal was finalized. The decal will provide a revenue stream for new habitat and the decal's visibility is a reminder of Illinois' commitment to protecting monarchs.

DuPage Monarch Project sponsored Jill Spealman and Chris Bosacki, two local educators, to the North American Monarch Institute's three day intensive professional development workshop in Madison, WI. Participants who complete the workshop are eligible to apply for a \$1,000 habitat grant. Jill Spealman collaborated with the Prairie School of DuPage on a grant for a monarch garden at their campus on the grounds of the Theosophical Society and Darien Garden Club member Chris Bosacki submitted a grant for increasing habitat on the grounds of St John Church where the club holds their meetings.

Habitat continues to increase and it is thriving from regular maintenance. Registered Monarch Waystations were up from 2022 and educational outreach by members remained strong with thousands of classes, events, programs, regular social media posts and an outstanding video made by a Fermilab Natural Areas volunteer.

The path forward is clear. We need to know more so we can do more. Every successful habitat project, teachable moment about pollinators and community science initiative adds a piece of the puzzle to what effective pollinator conservation looks like. They all begin with the dedicated people giving back to bees and butterflies so they can thrive.



The Year in Numbers

1

NEW SIGNATORY MEMBER

City of Naperville

30.2

ACRES OF NEW, RESTORED, ENHANCED HABITAT

*2.5 acres - Fox Valley Park
District*

6 acres - Glen Ellyn Park District

17.6 - Naperville Park District

4.1 - Village of Westmont

950

TREES AND SHRUBS ADDED TO PARKS & LANDSCAPES

*600 Trees and shrubs distributed to
county employees by DuPage County
Environmental & Sustainability*

*300+ Trees and shrubs planted by
Glen Ellyn Park District*

*30 Trees planted by Lisle Park
District*

*20 Trees planted by Naperville Park
District*

6

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Arrowhead Golf Course

College of DuPage Natural Areas

Prairie School of DuPage

Sustain Dupage

Westmont Library Garden Club

Woodridge Rotary Club

2

NORTH AMERICAN MONARCH INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS

Chris Bosacki, Darien Garden Club

Jill Spealman, DuPage Monarch Project

5

PROGRAMS

iNaturalist class

*History and Science of the Monarch
Craze*

Nature of Oaks book discussion

Plants, Pollinators and Prayers

Poets for Pollinators

44

REGISTERED MONARCH WAYSTATIONS

Outstanding Habitat, Engagement and Pollinator Protection

Safe healthy habitat is the very foundation of pollinator conservation. In a heavily populated county it is challenging to find new places and ways for adding the native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses bees and butterflies need. The DuPage County Environmental and Sustainability Division found a new way of spreading pollinator resources across the county by distributing 600 free native trees and shrubs to county employees. The two hundred white oak, two hundred chokecherry, one hundred red osier dogwood and one hundred bald cypress will provide food and shelter for bees, butterflies and birds for many years to come.

DuPage County received the 2023 Jane Foulser Habitat Award for being tree-mendous.

Increasing awareness of how bees and butterflies are declining is a crucial part of pollinator conservation. One of the best ways of making the issue visible is by inviting people to experience beautiful natural areas alive with at risk wildlife. Fermilab Natural Areas (FNA), an all volunteer group, is dedicated to the preservation of Fermilab's 1,000 acres of prairie, woodlands and wetlands. FNA offers many ways for the general public to learn about and connect with Fermilab's natural areas.

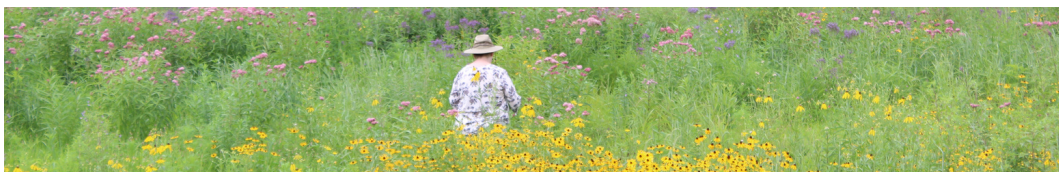
Fermilab Natural Areas received the Pat Miller Community Engagement Award for the diversity and quality of their outreach, including posts on social media, at volunteer work days and the annual Seed Harvest event. Volunteer Mark Donnelly's YouTube video, "[Tour of Fermilab Natural Areas](#)" was noted for its visually striking depiction of various habitats at Fermilab.

Garden clubs are extending their reach beyond the garden gate by taking on major environmental issues. The Darien Garden Club is an outstanding example of how environmental awareness and activism can be woven into garden club programs, events, civic projects and social activities.

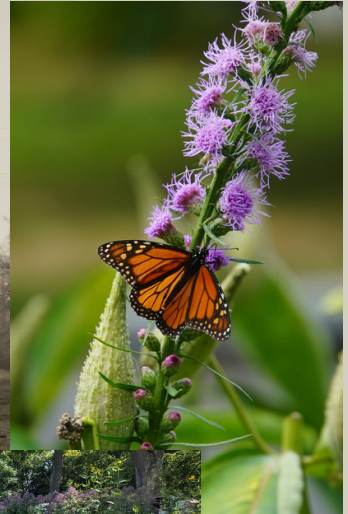
Darien Garden Club's accomplishments in 2023 included among others, maintaining several native plantings, giving away native plants and seeds and hosting a program on the importance of native pollinators, the primary causes of their decline and how they benefit from pesticide free native-plant gardens and landscapes by Carol Elkins, the Xerces Society Great Lakes Region Ambassador.

The Darien Garden Club is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished by a group of dedicated volunteer conservationists. Their educational outreach, community engagement and habitat projects are making a difference for pollinators in Darien and surrounding communities.

DuPage Monarch Project recognized Darien Garden Club as the 2023 Pollinator Protector.



parks adopt a new look



Turf is perfect for picnics and sports but there's enough room in yards and parks for maximizing the ecological potential of our land. And it's happening. A more natural look is taking root across the county.

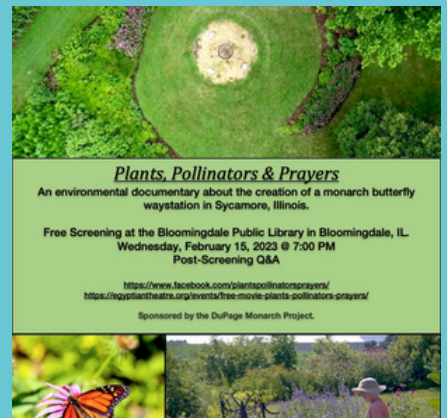
Acres of land that have been invaded by non-native species are being cleared then seeded or replanted with native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers. Deeply rooted plants that flourish in wetlands are installed to control shoreline erosion around ponds and along rivers and creeks. Downers Grove offers at no cost to the homeowner an opportunity to replace wet, hard to mow ditches with a bioswale.

Cities, park districts and schools are conducting comprehensive inventories of trees. West Chicago's tree inventory revealed a stand of 625 remnant oaks in Reed-Kepler Park. Trees in parks and on campuses are being certified as arboreta with 12 certified arboreta in DuPage County.

It's encouraging to see public and private landowners choosing natural and ecological land management practices with their many benefits for people and pollinators.

Community Engagement and Education

We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has to reveal to us.
--- Albert Einstein



Top: l to r Book and free seeds display, Warrenville Library; Monarch tally board, College of DuPage; Interpretative signage, Woodridge Park District **Bottom: l to r** Book discussion, Nature of Oaks, Wheaton Library; iNaturalist class, St. James Farm; Plants, Pollinators and Prayers, documentary film showing Bloomingdale Library



Mapping Habitat

DuPage Monarch Project’s goal is to ensure there is sufficient local habitat for supporting resilient populations of the native bees, butterflies and other insects needed for well functioning ecosystems.

As a starting point for measuring progress towards that goal, each year we request updates from DMP members about the number of square feet and acres of habitat that have been created, restored or enhanced and count newly registered monarch waystations. In 2023, the value of native trees was recognized and we began tracking the number planted.

The amount of habitat has been increasing each year but we need to know more about it. Natural areas vary in the quality of bee and butterfly food and lifecycle resources they provide. Science based definitions of high, moderate and low value habitat are needed for knowing the best ways of enhancing existing habitat and which plant species to include in new plantings.

Bees and butterflies need more than a patch of flowers. There are bee species that rely on both forests and fields, moving frequently between them. In order to support all species, we need diverse landscapes with woods, openings, meadows and every habitat in between. [Kass Urban-Mead, Wings pp 10,11.](#)

More information is needed about the pollinators in DuPage and the plants and plant communities they’re visiting. Data about the pollinating insects in DuPage is being collected with the ongoing [Pollinators of DuPage](#) project on iNaturalist. To date, 23,532 research grade observations of 1,541 species have been recorded. Monarch butterflies have been observed 1,084 times and are the second most frequently observed species. Common eastern bumblebees are first.

This year seven hardy volunteers ventured into three forest preserves and spent countless hours surveying native plants. They verified the presence of plants that have value for pollinators and had been previously observed between 2,000 and 2021.

Melissa Nachman, Melanie Robinson and Jane DiGiovanni surveyed at Churchill Prairie. They made 85 research grade identifications of 47 plant species. Connie Nestler and Bev Skoog surveyed at Mayslake. They made 22 research grade identifications of 18 plant species, Sierra and Jill Donaldson surveyed at Maple Grove. They made a combined total of 123 research grade identifications of 63 plant species.

We know which pollinators are found in DuPage and can begin tracking changes in their population. We’ve also begun to identify plant communities in three forest preserves that have species with value for pollinators. The next step is to identify which pollinators are visiting each species of plant. It’s an enormous task and will take time.

Knowing how to provide what pollinators need depends on understanding their foraging and habitat preferences. This is the time for finding the answers.

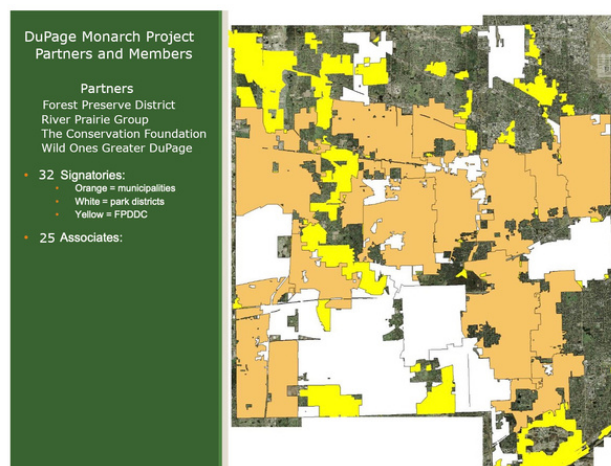


Photo Credits

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| Cover | Monarch on Meadow Blazing Star | Jared Metzger Abel |
| p. 5 | Holly Park, Darien | Courtesy of Darien Garden Club |
| p. 6 | Terrace View Park, Lombard | Lonnie Morris |
| | Oak Tree | Sebastian Beck |
| | Monarch on Liatris | Lonnie Morris |
| | Churchill Park, Glen Ellyn | Lonnie Morris |
| | Sheldon Peck House, Lombard | Lonnie Morris |
| p. 7 | Warrenville Public Library | Courtesy of Warrenville Public Library |
| | Monarch Tally Board | Courtesy College of DuPage Natural Areas |
| | Interpretative Sign, 83rd St Park Woodridge | Lonnie Morris |
| | Nature of Oaks book discussion | DuPage Monarch Project |
| | iNaturalist Class, St James Farm | Connie Schmidt |
| | Plants, Pollinators & Prayers program | DuPage Monarch Project |
| p. 8 | DuPage County Map | Andres Ortega |

