

Buffumville Lake hosts pollinator event

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The Buffumville Lake team hosted a program focused on pollinators, specifically bees and butterflies, Sept. 9 at the Buffumville Lake Boat Ramp in Charlton, Massachusetts.

Girl Scout Troop 30304 of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts attended the one-hour presentation, "Victory Garden for Bees!"

"The girls became interested in the plight of honeybees when a famous cereal cartoon character disappeared from the box of its popular cereal," said one of the Girl Scout Leaders. "The girls decided to dedicate their Silver Award Project to help the declining population by installing a pollinator garden of their own. When they saw Buffumville Lake was holding an event about pollinators and their gardens, they felt it was a perfect fit and decided to attend."

Buffumville Lake Park Ranger Nicole Giles and Entomologist Christine Helie hosted the presentation. Giles discussed the importance of pollinator to foods, such as fruits, vegetables and herbs. "These and other foods need pollinators to continue to make seeds," she said.

Giles and Helie led the group to one of the pollinator gardens at Buffumville installed by a Boy Scout for his Eagle Award project. The pair talked about the different types of flowers and plants that were in the garden. Giles and Helie explained that although there are hundreds of thousands of pollinator species, many of them are declining in large numbers. Helie said there were several main reasons why pollinator populations were declining to include pesticides, predators such as spiders and birds, invasive plants and habitat loss.

"People are building, but not mitigating," she said. "Also, plants like milkweed are thought to be weeds, but they are great for pollinators, especially for Monarch Butterflies. They lay their eggs underneath the leaves and then it is a great food source for the larvae."

The Girl Scouts came armed with a list of questions, the first being what kind of plants are best for their pollinator garden. "Milkweed, Queen Ann's Lace, Black-eyed Susan's, raspberry and blueberry bushes are just a few great plants for a pollinator garden," said Helie.

Giles provided them lists of native plants, bushes and trees the girls could get for their garden. The next part of the event took the participants on a short walk across the street to one of Buffumville's parking lots. Once there, Helie talked about the life cycle of the

Monarch Butterfly that lives about nine months. “Summer butterflies will migrate to Mexico,” she said.

As a special surprise, Giles pulled out cages with butterfly chrysalises in them as well as newly emerged butterflies. Helie explained that they would document, tag and release the butterflies that afternoon as part of the research. Helie and Giles showed the girls how to place tags on the wings of the butterflies and the girls documented their release on their cell phones. To the girls’ delight, some of the butterflies landed on some nearby plants and stayed long enough for video and pictures. “For some reason, the males always stick around,” said Helie.

The final part of the pollinator event was a continuation of the nature walk to a new wildflower garden planted by Giles. She and Helie answered the many remaining questions the girls asked to include the ideal place for their garden and the type of equipment they would need to install their garden.

Buffumville Lake and Hodges Village Dam host many interpretive events throughout the year. For more information, please visit their website:
www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Buffumville-Lake/.