

Increasing Pollinator Populations By Improving Habitat

Rockland Country Club
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Issue

Superintendent Matt Ceplo, CGCS, has been promoting and implementing pollinator-friendly areas that save money, reduce resource consumption and provide habitat for native pollinators and other wildlife for many years. When pollinators are mentioned, people often think of honeybees. Although honeybees are great pollinators and produce valuable honey, Matt decided to focus more on promoting bees and butterflies that are native to the area around Rockland Country Club. In order for native pollinators to thrive, native plants needed to be established to provide a favorable habitat.

Action

The first step was identifying and protecting areas that were already providing suitable habitat for native pollinators. Rockland Country Club has a variety of native trees and shrubs that are good sources of pollen and nectar. The plant species include dogwood, tulip, sourwood, redbud, lindens, spicebush,



Native meadows benefit a variety of pollinators while adding beauty and environmental value to the golf course.

serviceberry, witch hazel and clethra. These plants are all insect pollinated. Ceplo says identifying which plants are pollinated by wind and which require insects for pollination is paramount for improving pollinator habitat.

Special thought was also given to providing food sources for caterpillars and nesting sites for bees. Fallen trees with exposed root balls are left in wooded sites because they serve as nesting sites for bees. Dead limbs and trees are left for carpenter bees.

Areas of rough that are typically out of play were converted to native meadows, which consist of native grasses and perennial wildflowers. The native meadows take a few years to mature, but eventually serve as a food source and nesting area for bees and butterflies.

Results

Rockland Country Club's efforts exemplify the positive impact that golf courses can have on the environment and community. The golf course now harbors more than 32 species of butterflies, a host of bee species and a diverse bird population. Consistent outreach and education has helped golfers embrace the program and has given them a sense of pride in the positive results.

Throughout the process, Ceplo has learned about establishing native meadows and how to best maintain them. One lesson he learned was that these areas take a few to years to establish and they are sensitive to disturbance. During a construction project, part of a native meadow was used as a staging area for equipment and supplies. Despite efforts to re-establish this area, it has not returned to the same quality as the surrounding areas that were undisturbed. Ceplo feels it would have been easier to use a primary rough area for staging because any damage could have been easily repaired with sod following construction.

Converting over 13 acres of primary rough to native meadows has increased the number of native pollinators at Rockland Country Club. In addition, the mature native meadows offer substantial savings in water, pesticides, fertilizer and maintenance time.