

This One's for the Bees

According to the [National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators](#), there has been a reported 42.1% loss in bee colonies between 2014 and 2015. It's an astounding statistic that is garnering attention nationwide. The bees are not the only species in decline; butterflies, birds, and bats are also being lost from the environment. This decline is being attributed to a combination of factors, including a decrease of natural forage and inadequate diets, disease, loss of genetic diversity, and exposure to certain pesticides. Because of the impact this loss will have on our economy and ecosystems, the Federal government is stepping up to help restore populations and reverse declining numbers by implementing a public education campaign that aims to inform communities about the importance of pollinators and how to protect them.

As part of this campaign, the National Park Service is delivering free boxes of wildflower seed packets, donated by W. Atlee Burpee & Co., to educators across the country. After hearing about the NPS effort, we jumped on board and started weaving information about the pollinator initiative into our educational programs.

Reserve Education Coordinator, Lori Davis, has been distributing packets to students and visitors partaking in field trips to the Reserve. During walks along the nature trails, Lori points out various plants and wildlife, including the *Gaillardia x grandiflora*, or blanket flower, which grows naturally at the Reserve. The flower's vivid red and yellow flowers attract both butterflies and field trip participants alike. Once visitors learn about the benefits these flowers provide to the pollinator population, they can't wait to get their hands on the seeds.

One of the Reserve's main goals is to educate communities about natural systems, how humans are connected to them, and the benefits derived from them, which is why we're communicating the major role that pollinators play in food production and human livelihoods. Animals pollinate [35%](#) of the world's food production and contribute more than 24 billion dollars to the U.S. economy. By planting these seeds, people are providing habitat to help pollinators thrive. Creating a tangible connection between humans and the environment through hands-on experiences is what Reserve staff strive for, and providing people with the opportunity to witness, first-hand, how their actions are positively affecting pollinator populations makes efforts like these worthwhile.



Education Coordinator, Lori Davis, talks about the blanket flower on a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve.



Students and their new wildflower packets after a field trip