

Your Pollinator Habitat: Winging It

What About Monarch Butterfly Habitat In Pastures?

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a two-part series.

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

As pollinator conservation becomes more popular, many landowners are asking how they can participate in creating more habitat for bees and butterflies, including the iconic monarch butterfly, whose population has declined by more than 80 percent in the last two decades, according to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation in Portland, Ore.

"Your pastures can provide huge conservation to pollinators," said Anne Stine, pollinator conservation specialist for the Xerces Society at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Fort Worth, Texas. She gave an online training on Sept. 2 hosted by NRCS and the Corvallis, Ore.-based Oregon Tilth.

But monarch habitat has a significant drawback when incorporated into agricultural pasture. The sole broadleaf weed – milkweed, so named for its milky sap – that monarchs depend on cannot be grazed by livestock without risk of toxicity.

Still, "grazing management may be the best tool in our toolkit for managing milkweeds for monarchs," Stine said. "Milkweeds are perennials that thrive with light to moderate disturbance."

A perennial is a plant whose life cycle continues year after year indefinitely rather than being restricted to a single growing season or a two-year biological process.

"The best time to plant milkweed is the dormant season," Stine said, beginning in the fall when milkweed plants naturally die and release their seed-and-silk packed pods.

Milkweeds may also be known as wild cotton, Virginia silk and silkweed because of fluff inside the pods, according to Betsy Ann Wertz and Thomas Lanini, weed specialist with Penn State Extension in University Park, Penn. Early settlers stuffed mattresses and pillows with milkweed silk. During World War I and II, milkweed down was used to fill life preservers and flight jackets. In folk medicine, the roots of milkweed were used to treat asthma, dyspepsia and cough.

Once milkweeds are established in a pasture, if managed appropriately, they will continue to grow and expand that patch of monarch butterfly habitat. Milkweeds reproduce by underground stems and roots more successfully than they do from seeds. Grazing around the milkweed plants helps them by reducing competition, Stine said.

"What they're doing is essentially weed-whacking around it," she added.

However, the toxicity element of milkweeds is a concern of landowners – but not for Stine.

"For the most part, cattle are pretty good at avoiding milkweed in their grazing," she said. "They are more likely to consume milkweed in intensively grazed systems. Sheep aren't so clever, so sheep have been known to poison themselves."



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

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'Habitat Pays' Initiative Unveiled

SALEM – Gov. Dennis Daugaard on Friday announced the launch of a campaign to help South Dakota landowners maintain and improve habitat on their property.

"Habitat conservation is important in South Dakota. These efforts don't only enhance our wildlife population and preserve our outdoor traditions, they also benefit farmers and ranchers," Gov. Daugaard said. "I commend the departments of Agriculture and Game, Fish and Parks for finding common ground and working together on this common sense solution."

Habitat Pays is a campaign led by the departments of Agriculture and Game, Fish and Parks that connects farmers and ranchers with tools to help them develop and maintain wildlife habitat on their land.

The website has information about conservation programs, landowner testimonies, contact information for habitat advisors and information about the newly developed Habitat Conservation Fund and Board.

The announcement was made at the Peterson farm near Salem where the secretaries of the departments of Agriculture and Game, Fish and Parks offered details on the new campaign for landowners.

"Habitat Pays is a new way to bring the ag and outdoor communities together," SDDA Secretary Lucas Lentsch said. "At times, cost of crop production can be higher than the value of the crops themselves. In cases like that, it can make sense for producers to look at putting those acres into habitat."

The awareness campaign is a result of the 2013 Pheasant Habitat Summit and the governor's pheasant habitat work group. Last year, the work group recommended that state government start a campaign to connect landowners with habitat resources and launch a website specific to habitat management.

"That 13-member work group represented a variety of interests, including sportsmen and women, landowners and leaders in conservation and agriculture," GFP Secretary Kelly Hepler said. "The group recommended that we create a public awareness and education campaign to inform landowners about the resources available to them for establishing habitat. Together, we hope to perpetuate, conserve, manage, protect and enhance our state's wildlife resources, while respecting the important role of landowners."

Learn more by visiting <http://habitat.sd.gov/>. Landowners can join the conversation through social media by posting images, sharing stories and using #HabitatPays.

Commentary

The Flutters Of Pollinator Gardening

BY RITA BRHEL
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The last couple of days, the kids and I have begun to spot monarch butterflies on their long migration to overwinter in Mexico. We've not seen any more than one or two butterflies together at one time, much fewer than I remember even a few years ago when the monarchs would gather on our sedum, chrysanthemum and other fall flowers. They're becoming so rare that spotting one is almost like spotting a whooping crane or another seriously depopulated species.

Sadly, one flew too low in front of my car while driving down the gravel road near our home. There is one less monarch butterfly on the species' annual migration. But the reason why monarch numbers are so low aren't because they tend to be low flyers. It's mostly because of pesticide use and loss of habitat, both here where they breed and in Mexico where the trees they overwinter on are being cut down to make room for agriculture development.

The caterpillars of monarch butterflies exclusively feed on milkweeds, plants that are undesirable both in row-crop cultivation, as broadleaf weeds, and in livestock grazing as milkweeds are toxic if consumed. This means that the monarch habitat has been restricted to small patches of milkweeds in ditches, fence lines, near creeks and in other wild areas.

Like most people, I have an affinity for butterflies. They are beautiful, and especially in the Midwest where pesticide use is preva-



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daughter, age 9, is also a budding entomologist and so has a special interest in beneficial insects, including monarch butterflies. She participates in butterfly counts and attempts to plant milkweed seeds to make our own monarch habitat. Milkweed is notoriously difficult to grow, though, and our patch of milkweeds is small.

If we can get the process down, we hope to expand the milkweed patch into a pollinator garden. Pollinator gardens are for more species than monarch butterflies. Virtually all butterflies and other flying insects that visit flowers are involved in pollination, so this also includes bees, wasps and flies. We just think more about monarchs and honey bees, because we hear more about them than the others, but all pollinators – including the many different species of native bees, which do not include honey bees that are not actually native to South Dakota and Nebraska – are declining.

When planting a pollinator garden, pollinators require two parts in their habitat: somewhere to nest and flowers from which to feed on nectar and gather pollen. According to Xerces, native plants are the best

source of food for pollinators because native pollinators have co-evolved with the plants in their ecosystem. While vegetable gardens are often adequate for pollinators, native wildflowers are by far the better choice.

As for nesting sites, this is specific for each species. For butterflies, this is the plant on which their caterpillar feeds, such as milkweeds for monarchs. For bees, however, nesting sites may be best served through homemade wooden bee boxes but can also be provided through logs, old stumps and dead trees. Some bees

are ground-nesters and need bare ground or sand piles.

And of course, pollinator gardeners should avoid using pesticides, even those designed for organic agriculture. Crop rotation and biodiversity can be adequate pest control measures for many gardens. Of course, many of us live on acreages or farms bordering fields that use pesticides, or maybe there is a section of your property where you prefer using pesticides. In this case, it's important to manage pesticide drift so the pollinator garden remains a safe haven.

As pollinator conservation becomes more popular, the resources on this subject are becoming quite robust. Of course, as with anything with an Internet presence, not all resources are as quality as others. I prefer to get my information on pollinator gardening from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, www.xerces.org. Check it out for some easy ideas of small-scale, but highly effective, conservation you can do in your pasture or even in your own backyard.

With Gratitude & Respect

The physicians and staff of Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Carroll Isburg on his retirement. We would like to thank him for his over 40 years of service to us, our patients, and the community. His professionalism and dedication to medicine have been appreciated by all of us. He has made Yankton a better place to live.

Board Certified Pediatrician
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