

Bee City USA - Austin

Report on 2023

Pollinator Habitat Creation & Enhancement

Please describe pollinator habitat creation or enhancement projects in your community in 2023, and whether your committee hosted them or not.

City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department, Parks and Recreation Department, and Austin Water contribute to habitat creation and enhancement by designating 62,512 acres as conservation lands or preserves. These wild spaces provide habitat and resources to native pollinators and other native species. Another 17,529 acres of green space in the parks system provide habitat for pollinators in recreation areas. The Wildland Conservation Division of Austin Water has two dedicated programs, Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, and Water Quality Protection Lands that conserve habitat for seven endangered species and 28 species of concern and protect our waterways from dangerous chemicals. City Council approved the first parkland natural areas land management plan in September 2023 that will guide the Austin Parks and Recreation Department in restoring and managing natural areas to mitigate risk, improve resilience, and provide ecosystem services to Austin residents in perpetuity. To address the 76% of parkland areas in very poor to moderate condition due to invasive species, loss of biodiversity, and hazardous wildfire fuel conditions, the plan incorporates physical land assessments, management strategies, and social vulnerability indexes to determine how resources should be allocated. Potential future restoration efforts include selective thinning, fuel reductions, prescribed fires, invasive species removals, and planting and seeding. The Parks and Recreation Department's Natural Resources Division's Land Management Program initiated a survey targeting invasive species across 10,000 acres of parkland natural area. The findings of this survey will inform a management strategy for these lands, guiding future invasive species removal efforts. Volunteers engaged in manual removal of invasive plants using methods such as hand-pulling and small tools like weed wrenches. Meanwhile, Austin Community Conservation Corps crews, Park Rangers, and the Land Management team employed mechanical means including chainsaws, handsaws, and loppers, and prescribed burns, only supplementing with herbicide treatments for cut stumps when necessary.

How many habitat projects did you help to create or enhance in 2023?

55

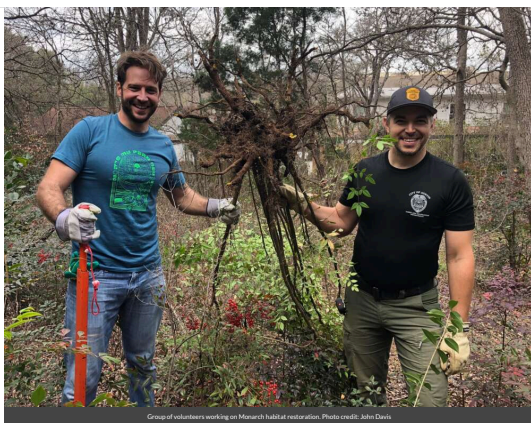
How many projects benefit monarchs, milkweed, or nectar plantings?

5

Please check all that describe the habitats your affiliate helped to create or enhance in 2023 with pollinator benefit in mind.

- Flower garden

- Vegetable garden
- Natural area with tree snags and stumps, and bare areas for ground nesting species
- Meadow
- Pollinator-friendly lawn (with flowering clover, dandelions...)
- Herb garden
- Native milkweed planting for monarchs and bees (where appropriate)
- Invasive/exotic plant species removal for habitat improvement
- Native pollinator-friendly tree planting
- Native pollinator-friendly shrub border/hedgerow planting
- Roadside/rights of way planting



Education & Outreach

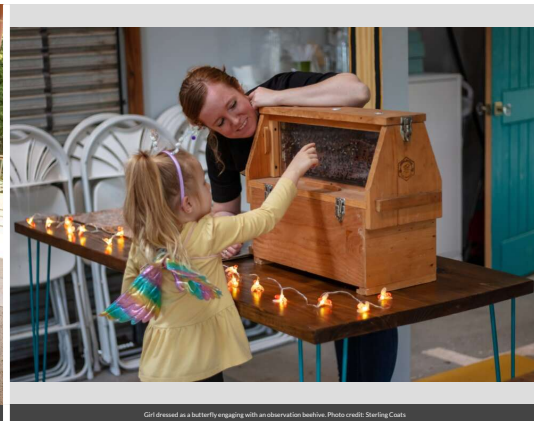
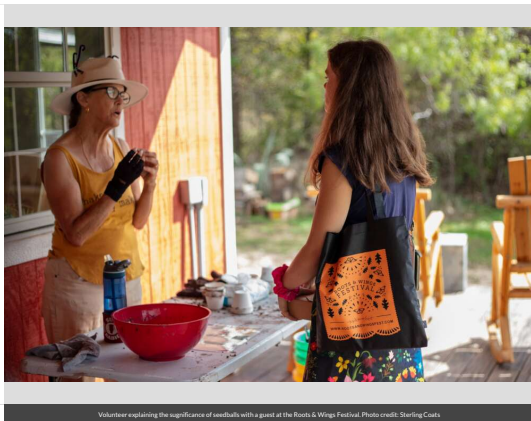
Please describe pollinator conservation events or outreach activities in your community in 2023, indicating whether your committee hosted them or not.

Pollinator outreach events included everything from educational presentations, a pollinator carnival, exhibits, the City Nature 2023 iNaturalist bioblitz, the citywide Roots & Wings Festival, and much more. The Bee City committee hosted educational presentations and webinars by local experts including Laurel Trevino, John Davis, Celia Bell, Lynne, and Jim Weber. Committee members presented to local garden clubs and lectured at local universities to students in the fields of conservation, historical preservation and tourism, and architecture. In addition to the educational programs, there were several fun hands-on programs and events that spotlight pollinators and their critical role in our ecosystem.

Such events included a family-friendly pollinator carnival hosted by local business Two-Hive Honey, educational booths at community plant sales, neighborhood plant swaps, and the Roots & Wings Festival. The Roots & Wings Festival was a citywide celebration of trees and pollinators. The festival was comprised of 123 individual events spread across Austin reaching over an estimated 15,000 individuals. Other events included the Austin Studio Tour Event “Pollinator Palooza”, “Seeing Bees” exhibit in Waterloo Park produced with the support of the non-profit Wild Spirit Wild Places Foundation, and the beautiful photography exhibit “Delicate Balance, Metamorphosis of the Monarch Butterfly” at the Beverly S. Sheffield Education Center located in the Historic Barton Springs Bathhouse. The Austin Public Library partnered with Central Texas Seed Savers to foster sustainability, bring awareness to the importance of native plants, and help to improve food security locally. This partnership resulted in the development of an annual seed exchange event and seed libraries at municipal libraries. The Austin Nature & Science Center opened a new exhibit that showcases the native plants in bloom each week in conjunction with their seed library. During Pollinator Week there were events throughout the city. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center hosted Pollinator Day which highlighted the link between human survival and pollinators. The Bee City Committee, Austin Parks and Recreation Department, and the Central Library offered programs and events every day during Pollinator Week. The Central Library hosted a series of Pollinator Pride events including Zine Night, Upcycled Starter Pots, Seed Packet Workshop, and presentations by the Office of Sustainability and Two-Hives Honey’s native bee expert. Austin Parks and Recreation Department hosted a free webinar, “Native Host Plants for Texas Pollinators”, that outlined specific native plants that coevolved with local pollinators to be interdependent species. Many of the outreach events were hosted or supported by the City of Austin’s Bee City committee, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, and the Austin Public Library, but it was exciting to see several events promoting pollinator conservation by local businesses and non-profit organizations that sprung up organically after becoming a Bee City.

How many pollinator-related events or outreach activities did you host or help with in 2023 (in total)?

400



Policies & Practices

Please describe actions taken to make pest management more pollinator-friendly.

The City of Austin has long adhered to a pollinator-friendly pest management plan. The Integrated Pest Management Program (IPMP) was significantly updated in 2017 and again in 2021 to address the following: Update current practices; Create and refine a common understanding of goals and objectives; Establish Best Management Practices and outline when to use mechanical, physical, chemical, cultural, or biological methods; Provide a training tool for employees; Establish policies, procedures, and practices that are standardized, efficient, and effective.

In your city or campus, are any policy initiatives underway to further protect pollinators, people or waterways from pesticides?

In September 2021, City Council adopted the Austin Climate Equity Plan (Austin Climate Equity Plan Summary). The plan includes the bold and aggressive goal of equitably reaching net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 with a strong emphasis on cutting emissions by 2030. The Austin Climate Equity Plan provides the following recommendations related to Natural Systems because as a result Austin could sequester an additional 5% of the city's total carbon emissions while providing more habitat for native plants and animals and green space that our community members value. 20,000 additional acres of carbon pools on natural lands are protected, and all natural areas are managed with a focus on resilience. 500,000 acres of farmland in the five-county region are protected through legal conservation or regenerative agricultural programs. At least 50% tree canopy will be achieved citywide by 2050, with a focus on increasing canopy equitably. All city-owned lands are included under a management plan that results in neutral or negative carbon emissions and maximizes community benefits. A key initiative for the City of Austin in 2024 is to establish a Climate Equity and Resilience Framework. The framework simplifies and clarifies our approach to the challenge of climate change, ensuring that we are addressing all angles of the problem across the City organization while balancing three critical components through the lens of equity: environmental sustainability through the reduction of emissions towards net-zero by 2040, increasing our resilience to shocks and stressors, and affordability. The framework's "Climate Equity Plan – Mitigation" section includes actions that avoid, reduce, or capture greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change and is guided by the Austin Climate Equity Plan, adopted by the Austin City Council in September 2021. The "Resilience and Climate Adaptation" section focuses on actions that increase our ability to prepare for and recover from shocks and stressors like extreme heat, drought, flooding, wildfire, and severe winter weather related to a changing climate and is guided by the Climate Resilience Plan for City Assets and Operations.

Did your committee participate in any continuing education on ecologically-based Integrated Pest Management planning?

We delivered educational sessions to front-line staff, aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of IPMP and their individual roles in helping protect pollinators. Our objective was to elucidate the underlying reasons for the existence of these policies and to dispel misconceptions, thus promoting informed decision-making and alignment with organizational goals.

Please check actions you have taken to make pest management practices more pollinator-friendly.

- Implemented or maintained a written IPM plan
- Only use pesticides as a last resort within the IPM plan
- Avoided use of pesticides in public sites containing designated pollinator habitat or other sensitive features (except when targeted use is deemed the best option for invasive or noxious weed, insect or disease management)
- Implemented non-chemical pest prevention and management methods on city or campus grounds
- Eliminated use of neonicotinoid insecticides on city or campus grounds
- Distributed educational materials to residents or students to encourage the reduction or elimination of pesticide use
- Sourced plants for city or campus grounds using “Buying Bee-Safe Plants” methods recommended by Xerces Society. (See <https://xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/buying-bee-safe-plants>)
- Sourced plants for city or campus grounds that were not treated with neonicotinoids
- Encouraged developers and private landscapers to source plants using “Buying Bee-Safe Plants” methods recommended by Xerces Society. (See <https://xerces.org/publications/fact-sheets/buying-bee-safe-plants>)
- Encouraged developers and private landscapers to source plants that were not treated with neonicotinoids

Are efforts underway in your community to further reduce pesticide use in residential or business areas? This may include neighborhood-led efforts, outreach to landscapers, etc. If so, please describe.

The Bee City committee actively engages with neighborhood associations, businesses, and gardening clubs, emphasizing the significance of Integrated Pest Management and advocating for the use of the least toxic methods for pest management. Main IPM Messages: Accurately diagnose problems before considering any treatment Use least-toxic solutions when addressing landscape problems Don't apply fertilizer or pesticides before a rain Don't kill every bug – 95% of insects are not pests Use pesticides as a last resort Always read and follow pesticide label instructions Encourage beneficial insects If you follow Grow Green practices you already practice IPM! The Bee City committee advocates that all eliminate the use of neonicotinoids and other harmful chemicals when treating for pests and prioritize not purchasing plants previously treated with neonicotinoids. The Bee City committee presentations encourage sourcing organic plants and participating in native plant and seed exchanges. The educational presentations regularly include information regarding how neonicotinoids are water-soluble and how even a small amount of the pesticide can be absorbed by the roots of a developing plant, where it becomes systemic, making all parts of the plant tissues deadly to pollinators. Notably, local landscape architect Rachel Raise, of Raise Design Studio, was one of the

citizens that initiated the process of Austin becoming certified as a Bee City. Through her work as a landscape designer for local businesses, she has played a pivotal role in educating clients about the importance of adhering to these principles when maintaining their investments.

Any lessons learned you would like to share?

This year we learned the importance of a social presence and marketing events. In the coming year, we would love to see the number of attendees at our events and volunteers increase.

Learn More

Integrated Pest Management Plan:

Recommended Native Plant List:

Recommended Native Plant Supplier List:

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https://www.facebook.com/PollinATX/?business_id=10152592499697447