

Xerces Pollinator Workshop

Can you tell the difference between a bee and a wasp? On September 2, 2010, 40 people converged on the Manhattan Plant Materials Center (PMC) to find out just that and much more. Jennifer Hopwood, the Midwest Pollinator Outreach Coordinator with the Xerces Society for invertebrate conservation, gave presentations and led discussions about the biology and identification of pollinating insects. She also gave presentations on pollinator friendly farming practices and what provisions the 2008 Farm Bill has for pollinators. Allen Casey, PMC Career Intern, and Mark Janzen, Plant Materials Specialist, Salina State Office, of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), presented information about plants that are appropriate for pollinators and some of the resources that Kansas has available for producers to establish pollinator friendly habitats. An exciting guest presentation by Dr. David Gordon, professor of entomology at Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas, featured pictures of different pollinating insects as well as spectacular video footage of bees making and provisioning their nests. There were displays of pinned insects that were caught at the PMC, as well as an elaborate display by Dr. Gordon of bee nests and other structures that are associated with both solitary and social bees.



Jennifer Hopwood talks about bee-friendly farming as part of her pollinator presentation. (Photo by John M. Row)

The audience that attended consisted of members of the public, private landowners, seed producers, community college instructors, Pheasants Forever, Audubon of Kansas, Great Plains Nature Center, conservation districts, NRCS, and other federal and state agencies in Kansas. Participants went on a brief tour of the PMC that showcased some of the artificial pollinator nesting habitat that has been established at the center. Audience members also had the opportunity to catch pollinating insects with nets and have Gordon and Hopwood help to identify and discuss interesting facts about them. Although the day was dreary and sometimes rainy, there were still

many insects caught and released and everyone had a fun learning experience. Thanks to all of the speakers for a professional and interesting meeting on a current and important topic.

Cowley County Conservation Field Day

Cowley County Conservation District (CCCD) and the NRCS hosted a conservation field day on September 15, 2010, for local 5th grade students at Winfield City Lake, northeast of Winfield, Kansas. Over 70 students from four schools participated in the field day. Students moved from stations that presented on conservation topics that included aquatic life, pollinators, forestry, soils, engineering practices, and rangeland management. Charles Hunter and Rick Calishaw, Southwestern College, Winfield, and Jennifer Carr, CCCD, had live fish, crawfish, and other aquatic specimens to demonstrate how the quality of water can impact the animals that use bodies of water. Allen Casey, NRCS-PMC, discussed pollinating insects with displays of insects that were caught as part of a study at the PMC. He also demonstrated how to collect insects for study using a malaise trap and had a sweep net available for the students to catch some insects. Dennis Carlson, Kansas Forest Service, had parts of trees for display to the students and had a game for the students to play to



Allen Casey discusses pollinator conservation to students. (Photo by Wanda Jackson, CCCD)

demonstrate competition among trees. Don Gastineau, Soil Scientist, NRCS, Chanute, had a soil probe truck on display and showed the students how to take soil cores and discussed soil micro-organisms and how soil is an important component of our natural resources. Jill Zimmerman, KSU Extension, and Denise Noonan, Kansas Farm Bureau, discussed different crops and how they fit into the resources of the area. Winfield NRCS

staffers, Jess Biddle, Soil Conservation Technician, taught students how to conduct land surveys using a laser level and discussed engineering methods to control soil erosion; Dusty Tacha, Rangeland Management Specialist and Barry Barber, District Conservationist, discussed rangeland management issues with the students and played a game that demonstrated good range management practices.

Wanda Jackson, CCCD, who organized the field day, commented that "Conservation Field Day is one of the best educational opportunities we offer. We are able to have 5th graders from throughout the county for an entire morning learn from a diverse set of individuals about conservation practices, soils, forestry, and natural resources that they might not be exposed to otherwise. We strive to provide an educational experience that the children will take back to their daily activities and implement to become stewards of the land. In working for the conservation district and NRCS, we all have the same stewardship goals in mind and it is a privilege to be able to share those goals and knowledge with students."

Maiden Voyage

After 16 months in the making, the "maiden voyage" of the new Shelbourne Reynolds stripper header was made on October 8, 2010, in a field of 'Kanlow' switchgrass. In June of 2009 the PMC bought a 12-foot stripper header for foundation seed harvesting. After the header was delivered, the PMC staff realized that the header was too heavy and too big, weighing 2300 pounds, to be used on the existing combines. So in the spring of 2010 the PMC purchased a used John Deere 4400D combine. Although the 4400 is bigger than any of the other combines, the feeder housing was still too small to directly hook up to the new header. That issue was solved by Jerry Longren, biological science technician at the PMC, who designed and fabricated a way to make the feeder housing of the combine match with the header. Longren took the new header "out for a spin" and found that the new header and combine worked even better than the PMC staff expected.



Longren makes initial pass through the Kanlow testing the new stripper header's performance. (Photo by John M. Row)

During the winter months, Longren plans to remove the grain tank from the combine. This modification will allow for harvesting into the metal bin seed handling system that he also designed for the PMC over the past two years. "The seed coming out of the field was much cleaner with the stripper header than it was using a normal sickle bar and reel header, consequently the processing and cleaning time of foundation seed should be reduced considerably," Longren said. After a thorough cleaning, the combine and header will be ready to tackle another field and a different grass species. Rich Wynia, PMC manager, commented "we are very pleased with these initial results from the Shelbourne Reynolds stripper header."

Outside My Window

The raccoon grape has once again draped itself all over my window screen. Pruned to the ground every spring, it manages to rebound every year more vigorous than the last. In addition to blocking much of my view, it has provided protection from a summer's sweltering heat. The annual regrowth produces no fruit, but they are inedible anyway. Had a true wild grape taken up residence here, then we would have had something truly beneficial—food, shelter, and privacy. Raccoon grape is a member of the



Annual growth of raccoon grape reaches the office's roof. (Photo by John M. Row)

grape family in a genus all to itself in the Great Plains Region. Its turquoise-blue, grape-like berries are attractive and resemble some species of grapes in leaf shape and fruit. Visitors to the PMC often inquire about the fruit. The vines climb over fences, shrubs, and trees smothering and sometimes killing the host plant. This woody perennial climbs by the use of tendrils. A high-climbing vine, up to 25 feet, they are a problem in areas on the PMC where the vines have climbed up on trees. It develops a large woody, tuberous root system that is difficult to kill, even with systemic herbicides. No wonder the plant is often called heartleaf peppervine (due to heartburn over trying to kill it, I assume).

~John M. Row, Plant Materials Specialist