

Welcome Pollinators!

BY JENNY WALKER BAILEY, GENOA NFH

Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) is now welcoming all pollinators and people to its new Children's Butterfly Garden. The Children's Butterfly Garden was created by hatchery staff to provide habitat for pollinators and an introduction to some of the quiet wonders of nature for all ages. Construction of the Children's Butterfly Garden began on June 22 to kick off National Pollinator Week 2009.

Students were involved in planning, building and planting the garden, while staff members provided direction, training and expertise. For Paige and Brandon, members of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) students Sam Stafslie, Katherine Murcko and Brandon Keesler, building and planting a pollinator

garden was an opportunity to learn the values of conservation while developing educational, social and job skills.

While working in the butterfly garden, students learned why native plants are important to pollinators for habitat, food and shelter, and, that natural areas where native plants are allowed to grow are in decline. By providing an area where native plants can grow without disturbance, workers are ensuring that pollinators will have a safe haven on the hatchery's grounds. The location of the Children's Butterfly Garden, next to the hatchery's office, is visible from State Highway 35 and is sure to be a safe haven for many weary travelers as well.



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Pollinator plants are attractive to people as well as pollinators, and a welcoming patio offers visitors a peaceful place to view the garden as it grows, see hummingbirds, bees, and observe the butterfly life cycle. In fact, the Children's Butterfly Garden has already seen its first butterfly larvae hatch and grow on butterfly weeds that sprouted from root cuttings. The hatchery staff hopes that visitors to the garden will discover the beauty and value of nature when encountering these small wonders that so often go unseen or are overlooked.

While a visit to a butterfly garden may be fun and aesthetically pleasing, pollinator species conservation is serious business. More than 75 percent of flowering plants and food crops are pollinated by butterflies, birds, bats, bees and other animals. Pollinators are animals that carry pollen from flower to flower as they collect nectar. When the pollen is spread, flowers are fertilized and fruits develop. Without pollinators to aid in crop production, many people and animals would suffer. Recent studies indicate that pollinator species populations are declining world-wide. Many of the reasons for the declines are unknown. Some known causes of pollinator population decline are habitat loss, degradation and pesticide use. Some ways to help pollinator populations are to increase areas for native plant species, minimize pesticide use, educate others about the importance of pollinators and show people of all ages how to help out pollinator populations. Visitors will be provided with information on pollinators and directions for planting a pollinator garden at home. Some of the most important visitors to the butterfly garden will be young children. Genoa NFH is currently visited by over 500 children each year. Many of these children

are preschool age or younger and are too small to enjoy some of the hatchery's wilder places. The Children's Butterfly Garden is a safe place for young children to experience nature and learn basic science concepts.

For those who want to study more advanced science concepts, the Children's Butterfly Garden will be a place to conduct research and ecological studies. Besides being a great educational and habitat opportunity, the Children's Butterfly Garden promises to be a fun place where people can rest, relax and get



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Genoa National Fish Hatchery's butterfly garden produces its first butterfly.

their hands dirty. Volunteers may help with planting and upkeep, and Girl and Boy Scouts of America will help with seasonal maintenance such as weeding and mulching. Junior Girl Scout Troop 069 of the Badgerland Council is anticipating their first visit to the Children's Butterfly Garden in October. Let's hope that this is just the beginning of many wonderful children's experiences in Genoa NFH's pollinator garden this year!

For further info about the Genoa NFH: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/genoa/>