

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: It's time to be a scientist for two days by taking part in pollinator census

Campbell Vaughn Augusta Chronicle

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Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The Great Southeast Pollinator Census, formerly the Great Georgia Pollinator Census, will take place August 22-23.

Participants observe flowering plants for 15 minutes and record the types of insects they see.

The census aims to involve citizen scientists in collecting valuable data for research on pollinator health.

In 2019, UGA created and hosted the Great Georgia Pollinator Census. But with the program being so popular as well as beneficial, states keep getting added to participate.

As the years progressed, the program has been so popular that other states in the Southeast wanted in on the fun. The name has changed to the Great Southeast Pollinator Census, with Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and the newest state to participate, Alabama.

And why do we keep adding states? Because we need information, and the more people who participate, the better the data is going to be. On Aug. 22-23, the census is happening, and we need citizens to be scientists during those days. It is a cool project.

What is pollination, and why is it important? The simple explanation for pollination is the act of transferring pollen from the male part of the plant (anther) to the

female part of the plant (stigma), so a seed can be produced.

Seeds make new plants, which is the goal of every living organism. Flowers are the tools that make this happen. Pollen has to move from the same species of one plant to another plant to produce the seeds. Pollination can be done by wind (pine trees or corn), water, birds, bats, and a variety of insects like moths, butterflies, wasps, flies, and bees. Animals that pollinate are referred to as pollinators.

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When a pollinator passes a plant flower for feeding or lounging, the tiny pollen particles stick to the animal's usually hair, and when the animal moves to the next plant, so does the pollen. With lots of flowers and lots of insects traveling great distances, it is a numbers game on which plants get pollinated.

Campbell Vaughn: [Is your lawn infested with cinch bugs or armyworms? Here's how to handle it.](#)

About 30% of all food production is directly related to pollinators. One out of every third bite on your plate, we need to thank a pollinator. And we are about to find out how well pollinating insects are faring.

In the agriculture field, there is a constant buzz about pollinators (I couldn't resist the terrible pun while my son's eyes rolled). There is a lot of information on bees declining, especially honey bees, for a variety of reasons, and it is a struggle to find solutions. Bees are great for pollinating plants, but we have lots of different native insects that are vital to plant reproduction. This census is going to help with research, and you don't have to be an entomologist to participate.

Go to the website gsepc.org and watch the two-minute video. Download and print out the census form and get ready for Aug. 22-23. (If you don't have a printer, we will be glad to print a couple from our office at 501 Greene St., Suite 100, in downtown Augusta.) The form is pretty cool because it has pictures of the types of insects that you will be looking at. With the form in hand, find a plant or group of

bloomers that are buzzing with insects. I have a newly planted dwarf butterfly bush next to some yellow lantana that I will be observing.

For 15 minutes, you will look for the particular types of insects listed on the form. The best times of day for observing lots of these flower lovers are 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. You don't have to differentiate between different species. You will just need to mark "butterfly" on the line. The same goes for other categories like wasps, flies, and bees. There is also a fantastic identification guide on the gsepc.org website to help.

The census is designed for anyone to participate. There is also a lot of other pollinator information on the webpage, including information on previous years' data. In 2024, 18,962 census takers counted 398,269 pollinators. Impressive numbers.

Enjoy being a scientist for a couple of days. Grab a kid or a friend and let's get out and count some bugs.