



Students Support Butterfly Garden at Silver Creek

Each year, the 6th grade classes at the Wood River Middle School—taught by Claudia Gaeddert and Ginger Rierden—pick a cause to support. This year, they wanted to benefit a special place in their backyard.

Sustainability is a part of the sixth grade curriculum at Wood River Middle School, and the students chose Silver Creek Preserve as their project.

The Nature Conservancy is honored that the 6th graders chose our preserve for this year's cause. Inspired by a visit to the preserve, the students designed and sold colorful buttons celebrating Silver Creek.

This story perhaps begins before the students arrived, during a summer event at the preserve. Oregon State University and other partners hosted a biodiversity and farm tour that included Ernie's Organics owned by Fred and Judy Brossy along the Big Wood River, a stop at

the preserve and a tour of the showcase barely farm owned by John and Elizabeth Stevenson.

The tour earned fantastic reviews, but more than that, it is one of those educational events that succeeded in getting people to think about conservation in new ways.

Conservationists at Silver Creek often think about trout, herons and moose. This tour brought alive the often overlooked creatures of the valley: invertebrates.

Often, people think of “bugs” in negative terms: As household and garden pests. Creepy crawly things.

But insects and other invertebrates provide amazing services. The Xerces Society, an organization devoted to invertebrate conservation, found that insects contribute approximately \$57

billion to the U.S. economy through pollination, pest control, food for wildlife, and other services.

“The sheer magnitude of insect numbers means that they could not be eliminated without leaving a hole so large...that the rest of the world's organisms would be unable to continue their lives,” writes biologist and author Marlene Zuk.

Insects may be better appreciated in the Silver Creek Valley than they are in many places. The brown drakes, tricos and other mayflies are justifiably famous. The summer hatches of these insects bring thousands of trout to the surface—and thousands of anglers to try to fool them with insect imitations.

There are other insects—in the sagebrush, on the edges of farm fields—just as vital to the ecology and economy of the valley. These insects pollinate crops and native plants. Without them, there



would be no farming or future for Silver Creek.

That was the focus of the farm tour. Biologists from the Xerces Society and farm manager Gary Beck talked about the importance insects play in our everyday lives.

This lesson also captivated the middle school students. During a field trip, they learned about the role insects play at the creek from preserve manager Dayna Gross and Gary Beck. They were inspired to raise money to fund a butterfly garden at the preserve's visitor center.

"The students learned it wasn't just about the preserve," says Ms. Rierden. "They learned that conservation is about how we live here and work here and make money here, while still protecting a very special place."

And so the students got to work. They

designed and sold buttons. They also created "The Power of Change," a drive to collect spare change undertaken by all students at Wood River Middle School.

"Eleven- and twelve-year-olds are game for anything," says Ms. Gaeddert. "I wish we could all stay twelve. They look at a challenge and think, 'Wow, we can do this!' There's some real magic that happens."

Inspired by the dedication of the students, private donors added to the money raised in button sales.

The result: \$5100 raised for Silver Creek!

What an amazing, inspirational effort, and one that will result in more beneficial insects in the Silver Creek Valley. The garden can also inspire the thousands of visitors to our preserve to make their own efforts to benefit pollinators,

butterflies and other beneficial insects.

Thank you again to the sixth grade students, the teachers and all who bought buttons or gave spare change.

Now, you have a chance to build on their efforts. Your donation to The Nature Conservancy will help finalize and build the butterfly garden at Silver Creek this summer. Join us, and the students, in recognizing the amazing power of bugs. We look forward to sharing this native plant garden with you on your next visit to Silver Creek. —Matt Miller

GET INVOLVED The project still needs your help! We are seeking an additional \$1,500 in support. Join us in creating a new butterfly garden at Silver Creek Preserve.

<http://nature.ly/AoRkvQ>