http://www.thepauwwow.org/news/saint-peter-s-promoting-biodiversity-through-native-plant-garden/article_e608ce92-d18f-11e8-8fb5-d71dac00f635.html

Saint Peter's promoting biodiversity through Native Plant Garden

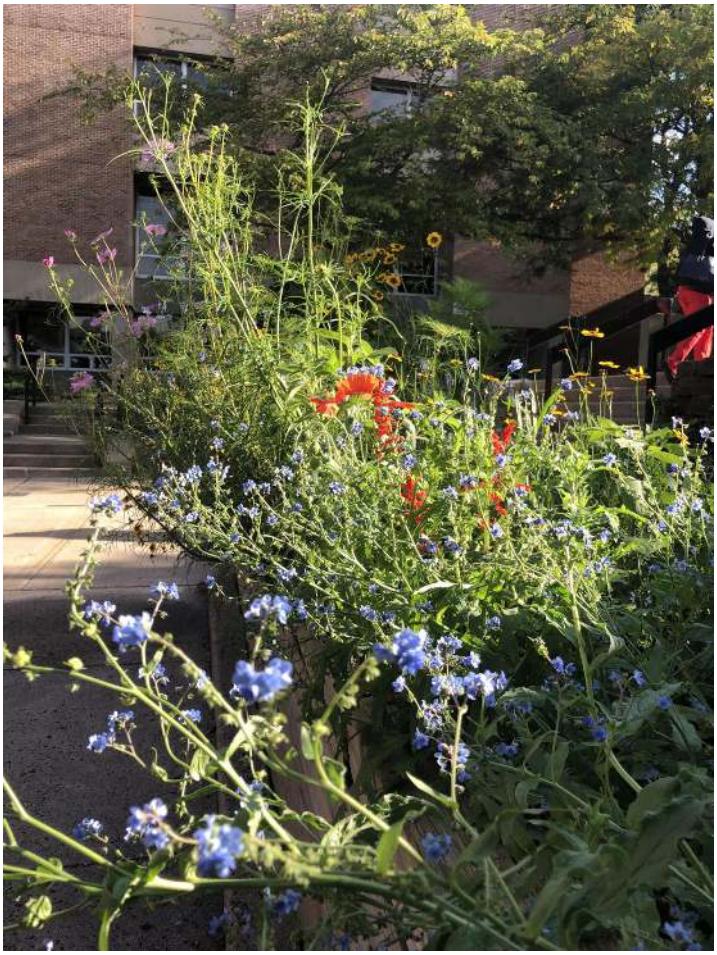
Thomas McLaughlin, Staff Writer Oct 16, 2018

Saint Peter's University was awarded a grant to create the university's first Native Plant Garden on campus. (Photo by Thomas McLaughlin)

Leading up to the 2018 Fall Semester, Saint Peter's University was awarded a grant to create the university's first Native Plant Garden on campus. The grant, estimated at $1,000, was given by the Society of Biodiversity Preservation to give Saint Peter's an opportunity to help protect the loss of biodiversity in the area.

The garden, named "Native Plant Garden for Birds and Pollinators," lies across the side of Gannon Hall. The creation of the garden was directed by biology professor Dr. Katherine Wydner and was maintained through her and some of her students at Saint Peter's.

"Yes, students have been working with me in the creation of the garden - this garden could not have been possible without their help," Wydner explained. "Four students helped out tremendously over the summer."



"Native Plant Garden for Birds and Pollinators" lies across the side of Gannon Hall. (Photo by Thomas McLaughlin)

The mission of the garden is to restore natural habitat for birds and pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. The creation of this garden has now led Saint Peter's in the direction of trying to protect and prevent the potential decline in certain species in this area.

"You might have heard that bees and many other beneficial insects are declining, and part of this decline is because of habitat loss," she said. "Many species of birds are declining as well, and a number of scientists have pointed out that the health of birds is a good measure of the health of our environment. In our garden, we will create habitat for monarch butterflies by planting their food plant, milkweed."

Along with the garden, Wydner and her students have been conducting research for Project Feederwatch (P.F.W.), an annual survey of winter birds across college campuses. Wydner and her team have been collecting data for P.F.W. for over four years, giving their information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"We plan to continue to keep track of birds through P.F.W. in the years to come, and in this way, we'll be able to document if there are increases in bird biodiversity on campus as a result of habitat restoration."

As the season of winter slowly approaches, Wydner has plans for her and her team to continue production of the garden in 2019.

Wydner plans to continue developing the garden in the spring. Most flowers in the garden are perennials that can stay alive for more than two years. The others are what's known as annuals, flowers that can only live for one season.

"However, many of them will produce seeds that can come up next year. If they don't, we'll replant them," she said.

Wydner is optimistic that as the garden grows the Saint Peter's community will also see a growth in the promotion of sustainability and biodiversity.

The mission of the garden is to restore natural habitat for birds and pollinating insects such as bees and butterflies. (Photo by Thomas McLaughlin)

"I believe that the Native Plant Garden will support the University's mission to be a green campus that promotes sustainability," she said. "Our human activities impact nature in many ways, so planting native plant gardens and restoring habitat is helpful towards sustainability."

Wydner is also hopeful that the garden will bring interest in biodiversity to the students and ultimately raise more awareness in the future on campus.

"A part of our mission is to foster education and enjoyment of nature," she said. We believe the garden will be educational to all who are interested in it, and we hope it will also brighten the day of passersby by bringing nature into the city!"

If students on campus have interest in assisting Dr. Wydner with the garden or have interest in joining Project Feederwatch, Dr. Wydner can be reached via email at kwydner@saintpeters.edu.