



ADVANCING
CONSERVATION
THROUGH
**EMPATHY FOR
WILDLIFE®**

Pollinator Action Toolkit

2023

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Introduction

The Conservation Action Committee would like to see us work together as a Network to promote conservation actions to benefit pollinators. Our hope is that by collaborating, we will both extend our reach and help share the workload! The Committee is suggesting any of the following messaging and actions, but it will be up to Partner Organizations to determine what level of involvement they want to have in this joint initiative. This is not a required activity, but with more participants, the greater reach and impact we can achieve together.

We realize that Partners may have limited time and funding available for a joint initiative, so we decided to continue the ACE for Wildlife Network Joint Pollinators Initiative with:

- Providing suggestions for utilizing empathy practices in conservation action activities and messaging (see below) that can be used during No Mow May, Pollinator Week (June 17 – 23) or whenever zoos are talking about pollinators!
- Encouraging Members to post links to their postings about pollinators on the Network discussion board.
- No Mow May signs.
- Sharing examples from Partner Organizations, other zoos and organizations on Pollinator Issues.

How do we define empathy?

The Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife Network uses the following definition of empathy:

"Empathy is an emotional state that relies on the ability to engage in one or more of the following: perception, understanding, feeling, and/or action in response to the experiences or perspectives of another living being."

As of August 2026, we formally updated our definition of empathy to the one above that is used in Whitley et al., 2026, [an open access literature review published](#) as a part of the Empathy Measurement in Zoo and Aquarium Audiences Project (EMZAAP). This change ensures that as a Network, we are using and promoting definitions that accurately encompass the evolving scope of our work. This definition reflects new learnings in empathy and conservation psychology research, emphasizes that empathy can be felt for beings beyond animals, and is more conducive to research and evaluation. Individuals and organizations are welcome to continue using [Young et al.'s \(2018\) definition](#), but any Network-created or promoted materials will utilize Whitley et al.'s definition moving forward.



Suggestions for Empathy Practice Informed Actions Partners Can Take

Framing:

- Talk about our neighborhood, our habitat, our yard, so audiences feel more invested
- Highlight the story of a bee, bird or bat (or another pollinator) to help audiences to see the uniqueness of the individual animal with a positive role in their habitat
- Utilize hashtags for No Mow May (or Low Mow Spring, Let It Bloom June, Thigh High July, Slow Mow Summer to accommodate different starting points for mowing seasons):
 - #NoMowMay #LeaveTheLeaves #BeeAHero #BeeTheChange #BeeWild #WildFlowerHour #30DaysWild #LowMowSpring

How to measure?

Review program, signage and social media content to consider ways you can increase how often you tell stories about individual animals as part of a conservation ask. Perhaps test messaging to see if one type of message (empathy-infused or solely fact-based) has more of an impact than another (e.g., more likes/shares on a Facebook post)?



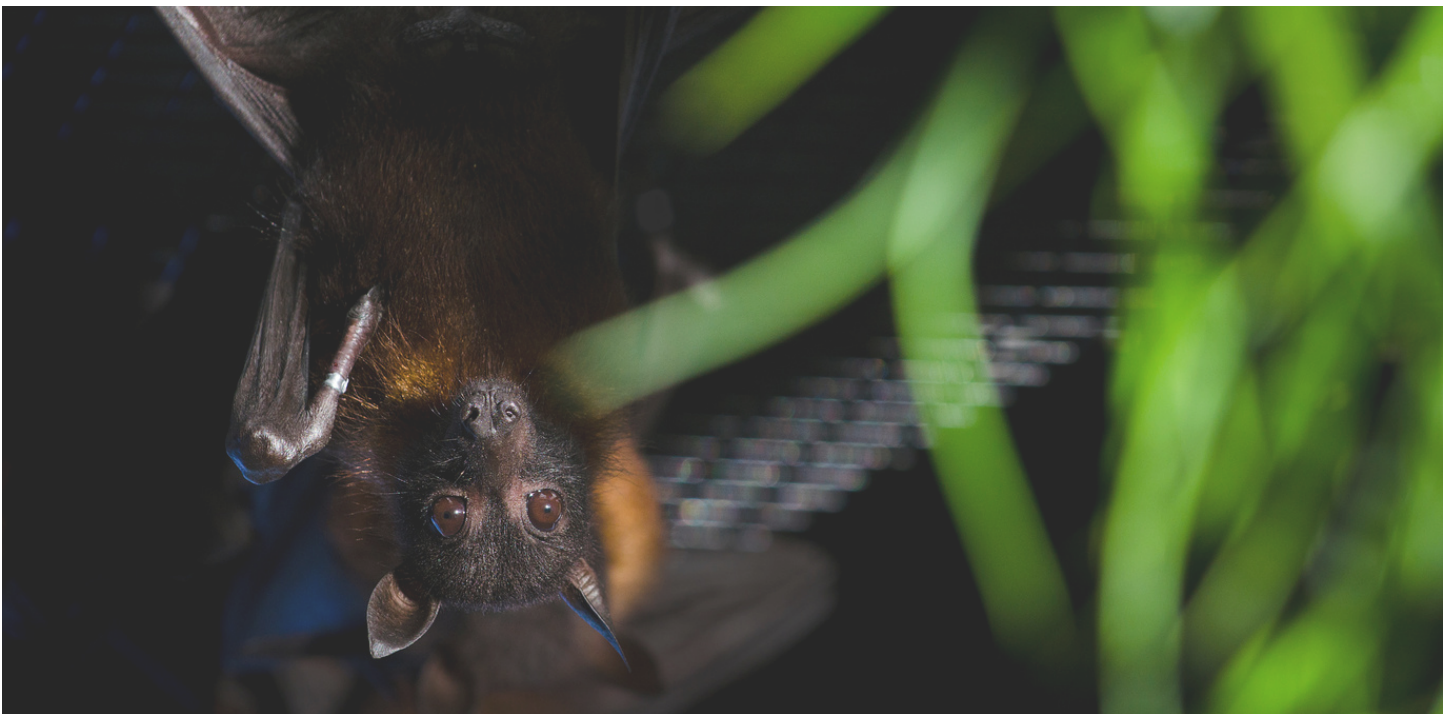


Modeling Actions:

- Have a pollinator garden on site with native plants and signage that explains its value
- Leave the leaves on parts of zoo grounds, and have signage explaining the importance of leaf litter as a source of food, shelter, and nesting materials for small animals and insects over winter
- Post signage that your zoo does not use pesticides (or if you do, see about changing that!)
- Sell bee homes and/or local honey in gift shop and use it as a place to talk about the value of buying local goods in supporting habitats and protecting pollinators
- Make recommendations about and/or sell alternatives to pesticides
- Host an invasive plant removal event in a local nature area (measure # participants, area cleared/replanted)
- Take the lead on becoming a [Bee City USA](#) in your area. Bee City USA is an initiative of the Xerces Society to support and encourage pollinator conservation in cities, towns and counties
- Register or encourage guests to register as a bee friendly garden: [BFF application](#)
- Display No Mow May/Leave the Leaves signs on site
- Start a petition to ban neonicotinoids pesticides in your state or with major companies
- Start a [Monarch Watch Monarch Waystation Program](#). It's \$36 to register a Waystation and get the sign — schools and education non-profits are high priority for free milkweed.

How to measure?

Identify ways your organization models behaviors now and then count if you increase any modeling behaviors at the end of the year





Increasing Knowledge:

- Share information about the value of pollinators (1 in 3 bites needs a pollinator), the threats and reduction of pollinator numbers, what they can do about it (see other categories)
- Teach guests about the importance of soil health and composting
- Post signage about pollinators who are just passing through the zoo
- Partner with local organizations already helping pollinators to share ways to get involved
- Develop social media posts about different pollinators each day of Pollinator Week
- Share which foods wouldn't exist without bats, bees and other pollinators
- Demystify pollinators — have signs or programs that highlight similarities with humans but also unique features about different kinds of pollinators (e.g., bats fly with their hands, bees are social just like us)

How to measure?

This should be used in combination with other practices, so see other categories for suggestions of measurement

Providing Experiences:

- Host butterfly domes, chrysalis and cocoon exhibit with regular butterfly releases (Tip: See if there are local schools that do butterfly releases and ask if you could partner with the schools to support them.)
- Encourage and/or coordinate pollinator community science counts like for [monarch butterflies \(journeynorth.org\)](https://monarchbutterflies.journeynorth.org).
- Lead bird and/or bat watching
- Have an active beehive for people to observe
- Host a [City Nature Challenge](#) contest each spring

How to measure?

of participants in events, # of animals counted





Practicing:

On Site:

- [Make milkweed seed bombs](#) (Tip: Confirm usage of the right milkweed seeds for your region)
- Make a bird feeder/bird bath
- Name a butterfly, bee, or hummingbird with a gift to support the zoo, and display those names in pollinator garden all summer and online as an [example of Name a Pollinator](#)
- [Sign a petition to Amazon or your state legislature to stop selling neonicotinoids pesticides. See an example here.](#)
- Sign a pledge not to use pesticides, to delay mowing, and/or leave the leaves
- Hand seeds out with compost (e.g., Zoo Doo) purchases to encourage native gardens

Off Site: (tell on site or through social media, but do off site)

- Plant native/pollinator gardens, including host and nectar plants
- Stop residential pesticide use/grow gardens organically
- Remove invasive plants (provide info on what to look for, how to remove)
- Leave the leaves to provide overwinter shelter for insect pollinators
- Visit farmers markets for local produce and honey and/or buy organic, when possible
- Help develop talking points for folks wanting to change Homeowner Association (HOA) rules about No Mow May
- Put up a sign that explains you are participating in No Mow May
- [Build a bee bath](#)
- Tell others!

How to measure?

of people to sign a pledge or petition, # of signs/seeds distributed, # of houses built/sold, # of pollinator items sold in gift shop, # of coupons used, # of people responding to a survey about an event, # of tagged posts about NoMowMay or pollinators, # of posts shared





Activating Imagination & Perspective Taking:

- See like a bee either by sharing pictures ([Photography of the Invisible World: Simulated Bee Vision II](#)) or using eyewear that lets you see what a bee may see
- Play a migration game with campers or school groups like the one [developed by the National Zoo](#)
- Have activities where children can do a bee waggle dance, or act like a bee in a wildflower maze
- Host a pollinator picnic cart: on a conservation cart, have guests assemble a picnic from toy food. Then take away everything that needs a pollinator. What is left? Would that be a very fun picnic?
- Utilize storytelling about pollinators' lives or mimicry of bats/birds/bees

How to measure?

Use in combination with other practices, so see those for measurement suggestions.

Possible Incentives for Conservation Action:

- Partner with local garden stores to give a coupon for native plants to attendees of a zoo gardener talk or when you purchase native plants, you get a discounted zoo ticket
- Register as a bee or pollinator friendly garden and get added to a wall/webpage or raffle for free membership
- Fill out a survey about a pollinator program and get a raffle for a free membership

How to measure?

The nice thing is that these can “bee” measurements: # of gardens registered, # of discount codes used.

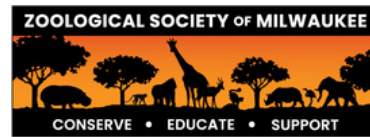
Evaluation Assistance:

The recommended measurement strategies in this document can be invaluable for assessing and monitoring the successful implementation of a message or action strategy. These can help you track progress, identify potential areas for implementation improvement, and make informed decisions about how to adjust your approach moving forward. It is important not to overlook the value of monitoring during the implementation process. However, they may not provide the full picture when it comes to whether you have achieved your desired outcomes or inspired guests to take action for pollinators. If you are interested in embarking on measuring the impact of your pollinator messaging or action strategy, but do not know where to start, reach out to empathy@zoo.org and we can put you in touch with our Evaluation Specialist to provide some additional support.



Partner Examples

Partner Examples



Other Zoo Examples

- [Bee A Pollinator Hero | Birmingham Zoo](#)
- Cincinnati Zoo Plant for Pollinators–[Plant for Pollinators – Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden®](#)
 - Goal to register 500 gardens annually
- [Toronto Zoo | Pollinators](#)
- [Attracting Birds \(nwf.org\)](#)
- [Bumble Bee Atlas Events – PNW Bumble Bee Atlas – Community Science bumble bee observations.](#)
- [Bumble Bee Watch](#)
- [Education Resources | Xerces Society](#) (Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation)
- [Five Actions to Save Animals from Home \(aza.org\)](#)
- [How You Can Help Pollinators | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](#)
- [Marla Spivak: Why bees are disappearing – YouTube](#)
- [Pollinator Conservation Resources: Pacific Northwest Region | Xerces Society](#) (there are also regional pages for the other portions of the US)
- [The Buzz 101: All Your Bee Questions, Answered! \(zoo.org\)](#)
- [The Monarch Joint Venture](#)



How is this a Joint Initiative?

In the second year of this initiative, the Conservation Action Committee made recommendations and Woodland Park Zoo staff compiled resources and suggestions for ways to enhance what Partners are (likely) already doing. In 2024, the chairs of the committee hosted a Pollinator Toolkit Lunch-n-Learn that allowed attendees to learn about this toolkit and share their pollinator initiatives with each other. Depending on the level of interest, we may try to do something more coordinated in future years. Please give us your feedback if you have suggestions and let us know if you make use of any of these resources (empathy@zoo.org)!

