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Appalachian State University awarded title of Bee Campus USA

By Harley Nefe

Appalachian State University was awarded the title of Bee Campus USA this year.

This certification “assures that it is important to our students, staff and faculty to provide safe habitats for pollinators and education about the pivotal role they play in ecosystems,” as stated on App State’s website.

To receive this title, seven steps were completed. A Bee Campus needs an established committee, host awareness events, sponsor and track student service learning projects, offer pollinator focused courses or workshops, post signage to educate campus, maintain a web presence and annually apply for a renewal certification, according to the Bee Campus USA website.

“It marks us to having a commitment to supporting pollinators, and I think especially now people are understanding that sustainability is something we need to care about,” Sydney Blume, App State’s campus garden manager, said. “People are understanding that bee populations are declining, and seeing that our campus is committed to that, is a badge of honor. App State can say, ‘We are actually doing something about this. We are transitioning to make this campus super friendly to pollinators because we know that it matters.’”

Ninety percent of the world’s wild plants depend on pollinators to reproduce. Additionally, one in three bites of food consumed is courtesy of insect pollination, according to the Bee Campus USA website.

“I’ve always been a big advocate for bee conservation, and you can’t explain it enough that they are incredibly vital to our survival and everything else,” Myra Solis, vice president of the Beekeeping Club, said.

The bee populations have been declining because of illnesses due to microscopic parasites called varroa mites, and “it’s become a crippling issue,” Catherine Anderson, president of the Beekeeping Club, said.

Varroa mites are contributing to the loss of honey production.

“Most all hives have some amounts of varroa mites; it just depends on how bad it is,” Solis said. “Wings can get stuck together, so the bees can’t fly, and they get kicked out of the hive. It’s something that people who are doing research still don’t fully understand.”

The Beekeeping Club works closely with the Office of Sustainability, the Gardening Club, landscaping personnel and professors.

Having resources and support “is where we are really going to make things happen,” Blume said.

An issue that people involved in bee conservation efforts often face is the fear of bees.

“I think generally people just don’t like bees, and they don’t want to get stung,” Anderson said. “Bees are just doing their own thing. They don’t want to sting you. They don’t want to die.”

While hands on experience is a part of beekeeping, it’s not the only aspect.

“It’s a common misconception,” Blume said. “There’s not a lot of work to do with bees. They pretty much take care of themselves.”

The Beekeeping Club promotes pollinator awareness and addresses the issue of declining bee populations, Anderson said.

Raising awareness and educating others on the importance of pollinators are other responsibilities of the club, and anyone can participate.