

SBALT REPORT

Pollinators are essential workers

By Paul Hain

While you have been slowing down and staying home, perhaps you have looked more closely at the natural world around you, even just to notice a plant outside your window. As San Benito County burst into bloom this spring, insects have been playing an important role in keeping our crops producing and native plants thriving. Although some crops are wind or self-pollinated, many have flowers that require pollination to develop the fruits and vegetables we enjoy. Over 100 crops grown in the U.S. require our benefit from the “services” provided by pollinators.

When you read the word “pollinator,” chances are you imagine a honeybee. Did you know the common honeybee is not native to the Americas? They arrived on the continent in 1622 and didn’t make it to California until more than 200 years later. So, who else is out there pollinating? There are hundreds of native bees, wasps, flies, butterflies, moths and others that spread pollen in our environment.

Most creatures that pollinate flowers are feeding themselves at the same time; the pollination is an incidental function. Some, like the tiny wasp that pollinates figs, go inside the fruit instead of outside. Others, like hummingbirds, provide us with visual beauty as they travel from flower to flower, spreading pollen. Flowers that bloom only at night are visited by moths.

To attract more pollinators to your yard or landscape, plant native pollinator plants. Find a list of suggested plants at www.tinyurl.com/y84uuuuhpb. Learn more about the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT) at www.sanbenitolandtrust.com. ■

San Benito Agricultural



Above: A California native Blue Orchard Mason Bee (*Osmia lignaria*) which pollinates fruit trees as well as native plants. *Photo by Cathy Summa-Wolfe*. Below: A Gulf Fritillary butterfly on Buddleia. *Photo by Karminder Brown*

