

GEORGE STEVENS ACADEMY

# Matters

News for Our Families and Friends



*Class of 2022 Hikes Blue Hill*





*Nora Spratt '23, second from right, with students in her bee education workshop.*

## Bee Aware

### Student Creates Native Bee Educational Program

Anyone who has passed a blueberry barren in spring has probably noticed boxes in the fields. These honey bee hives are a big help in pollinating wild blueberry plants and increasing fruit yields during harvest season.

Agricultural production around the world depends on commercial hives like these, but their value has made them the target of thieves. Articles about these thefts, colony collapse disorder, and other threats to the hives keep honey bees in the news.

"Honey bees have an entire industry looking out for them, [but] they're not the only ones who need saving," Nora Spratt, now a junior, wrote in the executive summary for a Girl Scout Gold Award project she undertook earlier this year.

"I became interested in bees and pollinators because I deeply care for the environment and its inhabitants," she said. "The cool thing about these native bee super pollinators is that they are wild and naturally live everywhere."





***Click above*** for a video of photos from Nora's workshops.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey website, there are approximately 4,000 species of native bees in the United States, and in almost all crops, "native bees are the primary pollinator or they significantly supplement the activity of honey bees."

But native bee populations are in decline.

Though "native bees are far better pollinators," Nora said, "some up to 15 times more effective" than honey bees, "the declining population of native bees goes unnoticed in the media." The top reasons for this worldwide decline are "pesticides, lack of food sources and habitat, and spread of diseases."

To raise awareness of their plight, Nora developed a native bee educational program she calls "Bee Aware" with help from volunteers from Blue Hill Heritage Trust and many others.

**[\[Visit Nora's Bee Aware webpage.\]](#)**

She tested the program by leading a series of workshops in April and May for young people in BHHT's Peninsula Explorers 4-H Club. Members learned about native bees, first from Nora, and then from Sara Bushmann, a science teacher at GSA who researches Maine native bees.

The participants assembled 10 wooden bee houses that Nora will later install on five different Blue Hill Heritage Trust preserves and properties in Blue Hill, Castine, and Sedgwick.

"The bee houses will provide much-needed nesting habitat for the existing bee population and foster homes for generations to come," Nora wrote. Volunteers also will "adopt" a bee house, helping to maintain it and clean it seasonally as part of her Bee House Stewardship program.



In addition to the bee houses, the students made milk-carton bee houses to take home, as well as bee baths to provide native bees with safe drinking water. They also planted pollinator-friendly flowering plants in a BHHT garden where food is grown to donate to the Tree of Life.

One workshop involved a visit to Leslie Clapp '82 and Blaise deSibour's "enchanted" pollinator garden in Blue Hill, where the students learned about native pollinator-friendly plants and observed a homemade bumblebee hive and "native bee hotel." "I loved seeing the kids learning by their own exploration and discovery," Nora said, "and we all had a fantastic time!"

Congratulations, Nora, on inspiring so many young people to take positive action to help save the bees!

*Nora would like to thank project advisor Chrissy Beardsley Allen '98, "Dr. Bee" Sara Bushmann, Megan Flenniken, Leslie Clapp '82 and Blaise deSibour, the "amazing" BHHT volunteers, the "awesome" youth participants, and her family. She also greatly appreciates the financial support from the Ira Berry Masonic Lodge #128, Blue Hill Heritage Trust, the Castine Education Foundation, and Castine Girl Scout Troop 1617.*



*Nora helps a workshop participant build a bee house.*



*Blaise deSibour pulls a frame from a hive to show to workshop participants.*