**Pollinators**

**Segment for Week of 28 September 2020 757-550-1854**

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

There has been a big push lately for pollinator gardens. What are they? Why are they important? The first question is: What is pollination? This is how most plants reproduce.

Pollination is a process that insures a uniform plant similar to both parent plants. Pollen from the male flower’s anther is deposited on the female flower’s stigma to combine and make seeds.

The movement of pollen can happen in many different ways. The easiest is gravity. The pollen falls from the anther to the stigma within the flower. The next method is wind. Every spring the whole world is covered with yellow dust, which is pollen, as the wind disperses the pollen from anther to stigma by random movements. This process needs a lot of pollen for it to eventually come in contact with a stigma of a stationary female flower. As far as I can determine, the rest of the pollen lands on my car.

No matter where you are, native plants are the best way to garden. This is best if done by encouraging native pollinators. Native plants that have adapted to the local climate need local pollinators to successfully survive. Insects are the biggest group of native pollinators, but mammals, birds, even reptiles and humans can pollinate.

 They can be almost any size, from the fig wasp that is 1.5 mm and only pollinates one of the approximately 200 varieties of figs worldwide, since it is the only insect that fits through a small hole in the base of the fig. One of the largest pollinators is the Black and White Cuffed Lemur of Madagascar. While searching out nectar, it collects pollen on its fur and deposits it on other flowers as it eats it way through the treetops.

Hummingbirds drink nectar from flowers, and in doing so, distribute pollen to other flowers. Locally, we have only one breeding species, but worldwide, specific hummingbirds drink nectar from only certain flowers. Generally, they have the right bill shape for certain flowers. The end result is that they **pollinate** only certain flowers.

Two other animals you may not think of as pollinators are some fruit bats and skinks. It all comes down to the fact that Nature works in strange ways.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded 4 tenths of an inch of rain last week.

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office.