

EDITOR'S PICK

Garden Club helps launch pollinator station at Fairystone

By Amie Knowles Feb 27, 2017



Contributed

A look at a monarch butterfly feeding on an orange flower. The Garden Club hopes to bring butterflies to Fairystone

STUART – The fairies wept when they heard of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and their tears crystallized into cross-shaped stones. That's the legend behind Fairy Stone State Park's most famous feature, staurolite: a combination of silica, iron and aluminum. While the park's been around since June 15, 1936, a new feature will soon add to the natural space.

Thanks to a \$7,810 grant from the Garden Club of Virginia, Fairy Stone State Park, in partnership with the Martinsville Garden Club, the Garden Study Club and the Garden Club of Danville, will construct a pollinator and Monarch butterfly habitat at the park in spring 2017.

The grant is part of GCV's Centennial Project, which supports Virginia State Parks.

"Our goal is to fund projects that our clubs and parks coordinate together and that fall within our mission and the state parks' mission: conservation, beautification, horticulture, preservation and/or education," said Jeanette Cadwallender, chairman of the GCV State Parks Committee.

One of 12 grants totaling \$129,417 awarded by the GCV to Virginia State Parks projects and programs, Fairy Stone State Park Assistant Park Manager and grant writer Andrew Philpot said receiving the funds "felt good."

"I was excited Fairy Stone was getting the project and grateful the Garden Club of Virginia gave it to us," Philpot said.

A 50 foot circle, the waystation will take on the shape of a Roman Cross fairy stone, or an intersection with four 90-degree angles.

The idea to make the garden area appear as a fairy stone "just sort of seemed to be natural," said Martinsville Garden Club president Becky Farrar.

The grant will fund the purchase of a variety of native plants, which Philpot hopes will attract wildlife.

"There should be something blooming all the time," Philpot said.

Since the plants will be used to the environment of Patrick County, the assistant park manager felt there would be minimal upkeep after the first year.

"It ought to be able to thrive in our soil here," Philpot said.

In the planning process, Philpot's looking forward to transforming the lawn in front of the main office.

"There will be a couple of benches for people to sit on," Philpot said. "We have to figure out spacing, arrangements, and how many plants will be in each one of the four quadrants. Do we want to set them up the same or different?"

No matter the overall design, the hope of the park and local garden clubs is that the area will attract wildlife.

"I'm sure the deer will be feeding on it," Philpot joked.

However, he's hoping animals that help pollinate the area will find respite in the garden.

"Honeybees, native bees, Monarch butterflies," Philpot listed creatures he'd like to see in the area. "Maybe [we'll put] some hummingbird feeders around."

Philpot also expects to see some other animals in the park.

"When you have the habitat, you get the predatory species as well," Philpot said. "You get a healthier ecosystem."

A highlight occurring three times during the summer, Monarch butterflies will be raised in the visitors' center and released in the garden.

While it's a natural area, the pollinator waystation will also serve as an educational space.

The grant includes funds for iPads and apps that interpreters can use to educate a constantly connected public, providing visual, interactive displays and outreach programming.

When interpreters aren't available, Philpot plans to have signs throughout the garden to help onlookers with plant identification.

"This collaborative creation will create a critical habitat for pollinators and Monarchs in a beautiful setting," Farrar said. "The tools this grant provides, both technological and natural, will enable park interpreters to present new programming and enhance existing programming for the public for years to come."

Receiving the plants for the garden in mid-May, Philpot's already busy recruiting volunteers to help prepare the soil.

"Hopefully volunteers will come to break up the sod," Philpot said. "As soon as we get [the plants], I want to get them in the dirt."

Just now in the planning process, the pollinator waystation will likely serve the area long into the future.

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