

# Johnson County Extension Master Naturalists

The Johnson County Extension Master Naturalists are the newest 'Master' program at Johnson County K-State Research and Extension. EMNs focus on education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas. Started in 2013, the program took off like a rocket with 118 volunteers actively participating today. Volunteers participate in citizen science projects, speaking engagements and hands-on partnerships to accomplish their goals of preserving and protecting natural resources and areas. Naturalist volunteer opportunities include managing and educating at the Pollinator Prairie, monitoring blue-bird houses, mitigating invasive plant species, teaching and monitoring water quality of area streams and helping manage natural areas in the county.

## Pollinator Prairie

The Pollinator Prairie was a chemical brokerage and recycling business from the 1950s to the 1980s when it was designated an U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Superfund waste site. In 1989, the EPA partnered with Boeing and the community to clean up and transform it into a public park. Af-



Extension Master Naturalists Extension Master Naturalists prepare entrance garden bed for annual Hasta Luego Monarch event (2019).

## Dollar Value of Extension Master Natrualists



Volunteers: 118

6,696 2019 hours

X \$23.35 per hour\*

**\$156,351.<sup>60</sup>**

\* Source: Independent Sector 2018 for Kansas wages

ter the remediation, the land was returned to the Olathe community in 2012 and the EMNs took on the project in early 2017.

The Pollinator Prairie was the first official project the Naturalists could call their own. The site hosts four gardens and four grass beds of

native plants chosen specifically for birds, bees, butterflies, monarchs and other pollinators.

The Master Naturalists maintain these gardens for public viewing and events. This allows EMNs to educate visitors on how to manage native pollinator gardens in their own backyards and the importance of pollinators in our day-to-day lives.



## Bluebird Stewardship

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EMNs who volunteer for the Bluebird Stewardship project monitor bluebird houses throughout Johnson County Parks. They monitor the boxes for predators and other dangers and check the boxes weekly to collect data on the number of nests, eggs, and successful fledglings. This is a citizen science project where the data collected is reported to Cornell University as part of a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds.

There are currently 400 nest boxes being monitored throughout the county. This project is for the bird lovers. EMNs are able to care for and collect data from these nests because of the partnership with Johnson County Parks and Recreation Department (JCPRD). Our volunteers also use their extensive knowledge on bluebirds and native



*Extension Master Naturalist, Vince Petrillo, inspecting bluebird nests. (photo credit: The Best Times)*

wildlife in education. They have curated resources for teachers, homeschoolers or anyone who is interested in learning more. There are lessons for students from preschool to 5th grade available at [johnson.k-state.edu/natural-resources/extension-master-naturalist/bluebird-educational-material.html](http://johnson.k-state.edu/natural-resources/extension-master-naturalist/bluebird-educational-material.html)

**“I volunteer for the Bluebird Stewards for a number of reasons. They help steward any cavity nester that takes up residence in our nest boxes. It is rewarding to watch and provide some protection for these living creatures as they struggle to go from eggs to fledglings. Bird populations in general are down due to human impact of their environment so I am more than happy to do what I can to help offset some of that impact. I am also interested in the citizen science aspect. As our database of observations grows we should be able to do some real analysis of some of the common beliefs surrounding nesting behavior.”**

**Vince Petrillo, Class of 2017**

## Land Stewardship

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EMNs volunteering for Land Stewardship projects work to restore natural habitats, manage land for invasive species, and create safe habitats for wildlife and locally endangered species. This project encompasses multiple areas in the county and is done in partnership with JCPRD and the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism (KDWPT). Currently, our volunteers are working in Shawnee Mission Park and at the KDWPT Prairie Center in Olathe. EMNs have helped lead corporate Day of Service events removing invasive plant species. They’ve saved Johnson County over \$100,000 collecting locally sourced native grass and wildflower seeds for future park restoration projects. The work done at these locations is guided by our partners to help protect, manage, and preserve our natural areas for all to enjoy.



*Bluebird nest at a Johnson County park. (photo credit: The Best Times)*