



# WILDFLOWERS — FOR WILDLIFE —

TEXT BY MARK HALL, CINDY THOMPSON AND LUTHER WANNAMAHER



The bees and butterflies — and biologists — are all abuzz about the Upstate’s new pollinator fields. Resulting fruits and seeds will soon benefit a host of wildlife species.

PHOTOS BY CINDY THOMPSON



**A** few months ago, I received an email from my SCDNR colleague and long-time friend Mark Hall, who works in the remote hills of the Upstate. I thought he may be reaching out to me about the black bear, wild turkeys or even ruffed grouse in his neck of the woods. Much to my surprise, he was writing to announce that his wildflower initiative, planted in some of the highest elevations of the Palmetto State, had taken off with great success. Mark sent me a single photo of a butterfly without much detail, except “a bug” typed into the subject line. In the next message, “Send a photographer to see us if you can.”

I was more than happy to take this assignment, as I hadn’t seen Mark for a while, and I never turn down the opportunity to travel all the way up to Sassafras Mountain and other mountaintop lookouts. It was a beautiful day! Glorious blue skies! I had a good feeling about this trip.

Mark's truck has seen plenty of long-stretching, bumpy miles up and down the steep roads of the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges. With windows rolled down to breathe in that fresh mountain air, and camera bag in tow, we followed the gravel-dirt road, back and forth up the steep mountainside. We were headed toward Jumping-off Rock — spotting bright-orange, wild growing mushrooms as we rolled along.

When we reached the planted fields, we hopped out of the truck and met up with Ken Forrester, an SCDNR Jocassee lead wildlife technician who was operating the bulldozer that day. With a little innovative thinking between the three of us, the bulky bulldozer served double duty as an elevator of sorts, and we were able to capture a few photographs from a higher-up perspective.

I will let Mark take it from here, as the work he is doing is profoundly important to the future of our great state. However, I will add that during this photo shoot, an assortment of pollinators were buzzing in a harmony of sorts all across the fields. A proud moment indeed! And as we descended down the mountain at the end of the day, a black bear darted across the road, evidence that pollinating insects are supporting native plants and wildlife.

— Cindy Thompson, *SCW* managing editor.

## THE JOCASSEE GORGES POLLINATOR PROJECT

BY SCDNR WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST  
MARK HALL

Several places within the Jocassee Gorges received a colorful facelift in 2020, thanks to special funding through Duke Energy's Habitat Enhancement Program (HEP). As part of the Keowee-Toxaway relicensing agreement related to Lakes Jocassee and Keowee, Duke Energy collected fees associated with docks and distributes the monies each year for projects within the respective watersheds to promote wildlife habitat improvements.

I approached the HEP committee in 2019 with a proposal to establish wildflower patches throughout Jocassee Gorges to benefit pollinator species. Pollinators, including bats, hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and other invertebrates, visit



wildflowers and subsequently distribute pollen among a wide range of fruit and seed-bearing plants. The fruits and seeds produced are eventually consumed by a host of game and non-game animals. Pollinator species play a key role in the complex ecological chain that is the foundation for diverse vegetation within Jocassee.

In early 2020, undesirable vegetation was eliminated on several unproductive, open fields within Jocassee. A special mix of native wildflowers was planted in early May, and luckily, mother nature provided the summer rains to nurture the wildflower crop. Several miles of roadsides were also hydro-seeded with the wildflower mixture to further promote the benefits associated with pollinator species throughout the property. The special seed mixture carries a hefty price tag of more than \$45 per pound, as compared to a standard seed mix that runs a few dollars per unit. The HEP provided the funding required for the more expensive planting.

Jocassee Gorges supports an incredible landscape, however, nearly 99 percent of the area is totally forested and thus, heavily shaded. Roadsides and small, scattered fields represent the few places where sunlight penetrates to allow herbaceous, flowering plants to flourish. Intensive management of the small percentage of open areas is a very important endeavor. Several additional miles of roadsides will be treated in the spring of 2021.

During late summer of 2020 the new wildflower patches were inspected. The sites were literally buzzing with life! Bees of all descriptions, hummingbirds and hundreds of butterflies bounced among the new, colorful foliage gathering nectar and doing their job — spreading pollen. Such spectacles of nature are adding a new dimension to an already amazing Wildlife Management Area. Visitors, new and old, are bound to appreciate those new diamonds in the rough of the Jocassee Gorges.

Mark Hall has served the SCDNR as a certified wildlife biologist and registered forester for almost three decades. As Jocassee Gorges project manager, his work has helped shaped a conservation legacy for the state of South Carolina.



## PLANTING FOR WILDLIFE

TEXT BY LUTHER WANNAMAHER

PHOTOS BY HEYWARD HICKMAN

Wildlife Biologist Mark Hall worked with L. B. Wannamaker Seed and Wildlife Center to plan the pollinator field project in Jocassee Gorges. Here are a few tips that may inspire plans for pollinator gardens or wildlife food plots in your area.

Here at Wannamaker Seed and Wildlife Center, we love our love our woodland and wildlife areas, and we enjoy advising the hunters and landowners who value theirs.

Many landowners do not realize what a treasure they have in native plant seeds that are dormant on undisturbed lands and waiting to be released by thinning/harvesting their pine trees and prescribed burning every two-three years. What an amazing benefit for pollinators and for encouraging larger populations and more diverse species of wild birds. As a result of following these practices on five hundred acres, NRCS Wildlife Biologist Sudie Thomas found many species of native lespedezas as well as asters and mints with multiple flower heads. In December 2020, members of the Audubon Society and other bird enthusiasts identified an amazing sixty-two different species of wild birds in one day.

We recommend planting pollinating mixtures specifically adapted to the Southeast and blooming in succession over an extended period of time. Some mixtures contain ten, fifteen, or up to thirty different types of seed well adapted for small garden plots or larger areas.

Wannamaker Wildlife provides multiple opportunities to engage youth in wildlife plantings and activities by partnering with Clemson University in distributing seed to 4-H members, by hosting a youth dove shoot and contributing small packets of wildflower seed to churches and garden clubs.

For deer and wild turkeys, we focus on plantings that provide a year-round food supply so that they don't lose critical body mass in the winter months. Some of our customers have had extraordinary success in year-round planting including Magic Carpet, Naked Oats and Sweet Blue Lupine. A club in Swansea reported a net gain of forty pounds per deer after using our seed mixtures.

L.B. Wannamaker Seed and Wildlife Center is a family business that is the culmination of generations of research and development. Their role in benefitting agricultural practices in South Carolina began with J.E. Wannamaker, who was one of the founding members of Clemson Agricultural College.

"Today at L.B. Wannamaker Seed and Wildlife Center, we are constantly experimenting with new crops and better varieties, and all are tested on our farms. We keep a watchful eye on our crops from the first seeds in the soil to the last seed in the bag." — Luther B. Wannamaker. To learn more about seeds that benefit wildlife, visit their company website at <https://wannamakerwildlife.shutterfly.com/> or call 800-378-2107.

