

Audubon Rockies abuzz with Longmont pollinator garden

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7 / 7 An aerial shot of the solar garden and ribbon cutting, courtesy of Don's Drones of Denver | Don Ireland

The greater Colorado birding community is abuzz as Audubon Rockies unveiled their new pollinator garden at [Jack's Solar Garden](#) in Longmont. Audubon Rockies is the regional chapter of the National Audubon Society, focusing on bird conservation in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah.

As part of Audubon's [Habitat Hero](#) program, the [pollinator garden](#) is the largest project to date for the organization. The forty-foot living fence around the solar panel arrays provides habitat for more than 3,000 native trees, shrubs and perennials alongside the wildlife that thrives in the ecosystem.

The ribbon-cutting was attended by leadership and members of the Audubon Rockies, Jack's Solar Garden and [Colorado Agrivoltaic Learning Center](#), along with local researchers and representatives from the offices of U.S. Congressional Representatives Ken Buck and Joe Neguse.

“It takes every single one of us to make a difference for our environment,” said Audubon Rockies Executive Director Holloran during the ribbon-cutting. “It’s projects like this that lead to further innovation.”

Partnerships with groups like Audubon Rockies are why Jack’s Solar Garden exists, according to Colorado Agrivoltaic Learning Center’s Education Director Andy Bingle.

“It’s all about the relationships here, with these organizations and research groups, but also the relationship between the solar panels and the plants,” Bingle said. “There are benefits when technology and nature can work together, and we love working with these partners to make the magic happen.”

The Habitat Hero program promotes locals and Audubon Society members to fill their gardens with diverse native plants, to provide shelter for birds and insects, conserve water, limit the spread of invasive plants and reduce the usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Conversations with the pollinator project started almost three years ago, when Jack’s Solar Garden owner Byron Kominek approached Audubon Rockies about making use of the space, according to Holloran.

A volunteer planting was set for early 2020 but like so many other things, COVID delayed those plans. Professionals from United Ecology and Earth Love Gardens put the plants in the ground by May 2020, and more than a year later some of the native plants and trees are more than six feet tall.

“We’re just so happy to be out here and see the start of the garden coming up,” Holloran said. “We’re looking forward to years to come watching it really explode into a wonderful forty-foot natural fence for birds, bees and butterflies.”

The Audubon Society is known for bird-watchers around the country, but the organization goes beyond binoculars to promote environmental advocacy, conservation, research and education to protect the ecosystem. Programs like Habitat Hero typically happen on a smaller scale in home gardens as a way to show how the average person can still make a healthy impact on their environment.

“Science leads the way for everything,” Holloran said. “This is just a great opportunity to get it out in front of the public and let people know what they can do. You don’t have to have forty acres, you can have planters on your back porch.”

Audubon Rockies’ Habitat Hero Coordinator Jamie Weiss helped lead the solar garden pollinator project, inspired by the collaboration between habitat building and renewable energy. Weiss was happy to see the work coming to fruition even in its early stages.

“The idea behind this is the many benefits the garden has to offer as a wildlife habitat and you’re connecting people to nature,” Weiss said. “This is also hopefully a model for other green industry leaders to adapt.”

The Audubon Rockies pollinator garden and Jack's Solar Garden are open for public tours on Saturday mornings.

Correction: The National Audubon Society focuses on bird conservation in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, not Idaho as previously printed.



***About the Author:* Matt Maenpaa**

An avid writer, editor and photographer, Matt strives for compassion and integrity.
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