Benjamin A. Rawald

TEEA 2020 Winner: Individual

Benjamin Rawald, a senior at Brackett High School, recognized that milkweed is both critical to the survival of monarchs and declining due to use of glyphosate herbicides. In response to what he saw as a critical situation, Benjamin teamed up with a professor at Sul Ross University to design easy-to-distribute milkweed seed-balls.

Working with over 400 youths from three elementary schools, a middle school, four daycares, and the Laughlin Air Force Base Youth Center, Ben coordinated the planting of over 150,000 seeds over 1,500 acres, covering a linear distance of 36 miles. He single-handedly managed the project logistics, including reaching out to and gaining permission from landowners to plant milkweed seeds on private property.

Community outreach and involvement are critical to this ongoing project. Not only has planting milkweed increased the number of migrating monarch butterflies, but the project has also changed the community's opinion on milkweed from "toxic weed" to "pollinating wildflower."

Benjamin is also an Eagle Scout who has completed every merit badge the Scout and Venturing programs offer. For his extensive work in conservation, he received the William T. Hornaday Silver Medal (scouting's highest conservation award). The Hornaday award requires a conservation project and Benjamin decided to focus on the declining number of monarch butterflies migrating through Val Verde and McKinney Counties.