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Audubon Zoo Welcomes "Bee Palace" New sculpture teaches about the importance of pollinator conservation

(New Orleans, La.) - Audubon Zoo is home to a "Bee Palace," a beautiful sculpture that also functions as a nesting site for wild bee pollinators.

Located in the Zoo's Butterfly Garden right outside the gorilla exhibit, the Bee Palace is designed to serve as an educational tool to teach communities about dwindling bee populations worldwide.

The sculpture is a creation of award-winning visual artist Esther Solondz, a Rhode island resident who recently completed an artist-in residence program at A Studio in the Woods, the Tulane University artists' retreat on New Orleans' West Bank.

"This is a very special and timely addition to our gardens because of our concern for the future of pollinators," said Audubon Director of Education Projects Brenda Walkenhorst. "Bees are very important to not only the pollination of the fruits and vegetables we eat, but also for the pollination of the plants and grasses that our livestock eat. No bees, no food."

Walkenhorst said the Bee Palace will provide a home for solitary bees to lay their eggs and give Audubon's education staff an opportunity to start a discussion on the importance of our pollinators.

Solondz said it is a little-known fact that more than 90 percent of the world's bee species do not fit the definition of the sociable honeybee.

For example, she said solitary bees don't live in a colony, don't have a queen and don't make honey. In addition, they are non-aggressive, do not swarm and are safe around children and pets.

But Solondz said solitary bees play a critical role as pollinators. Because they do not have baskets for carrying pollen, each time they visit a flower they lose far more pollen than social bees, which makes them prolific pollinators.

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