



## Invasive Plants are Bad for the Birds

Bird watchers may see birds eating the berries of invasives like multiflora rose, honeysuckle, and autumn olive, or they may see birds building nests in those same invasive shrubs, but what these wildlife enthusiasts might not know is that these habits may cause birds more harm than good. Here are some reasons why you shouldn't plant non-natives in your yard and why you should remove invasives if you have them.

- Migratory birds prefer edge habitat and shrub-sapling forests for finding food. These areas typically contain more invasive shrubs than in dense mature forests.<sup>1</sup> Researchers find that migratory birds that eat mostly berries, including those from invasive plants, may not put on enough fat to fly non-stop to their winter home. A combination of insect protein and fruit carbohydrates are needed.<sup>2</sup> Energy density and fat content are typically higher in the berries of native plants than in those of invasives, helping sustain them for the long haul.<sup>3</sup>
  - In a study of backyard plants, the natives supported 35 times more butterflies and moths than invasive plants. Birds, particularly nestlings, depend on insects for much of their food supply, so areas dominated by non-natives and invasives provide much less food for our feathered friends.<sup>4</sup>
- Even when invasives provide food for birds there can be dire results, as in the case of Autumn and Russian Olive. Until recently these shrubs were promoted by various government agencies to stabilize soil and provide food for wildlife. Birds do eat the berries from these shrubs, but because so many were planted along roadsides, birds end up getting hit by cars. Those that do survive spread the seeds to new locations.<sup>4</sup>
  - Nest predation can have a drastic effect on bird nesting success. Research has shown that mortality rates of young understory birds can be three times higher in nests located in invasive shrubs rather than in natives, particularly in urban areas.<sup>5</sup>

Native plants provide food and shelter for birds and other wildlife. They enrich our landscapes with their beauty and bring a sense of place wherever you go. When choosing plants for your landscape, go native! Just say **NO** to invasive plants that are more like junk food to birds than a quality, beneficial food source.



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3. Smith, Susan B. et. al. "Fruit Quality and Consumption by Songbirds During Autumn Migration." *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*. 119(3), 2007, pp. 419-428.
4. Tallamy, Douglas. *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*. Timber Press Inc., 2007.
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