

Going Native is for the Birds

This may be preaching to the choir, you may already know this, but hear me out. Invasive non-native plants pose serious threats to our native plants by outcompeting them for resources, yet they provide little for the sustenance of birds and other pollinators locally. Invasive plants are fast growing and have few of the natural predators and diseases that would control them in their native environment. In areas that have been disturbed by humans for road building, residential and commercial development, etc. these invasive non-natives flourish – think about kudzu, English ivy, multiflora rose, porcelain berry draped all over disturbed areas where bamboo and Japanese stilt grass pop up and proliferate. These invasive non-natives are replacing our native plant species and are altering the native ecology of Asheville. You can click on these links to find a list of invasive plant species. [NC Wildflower Society Invasives List](#) and a USDA Forest Service list of Southern Forest invasive plants, <https://www.invasive.org/eastern/srs/>

For these reasons, with the support of Audubon North Carolina, Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society, and various other environmental groups, an ordinance has been proposed to the City of Asheville that would encourage greater plantings of native plants on Asheville public property and would require that any new plantings of invasive non-native plants be removed – in other words, prevent their planting. In North Carolina Winston-Salem and Moore County have passed similar ordinances. The state of Connecticut and the city of New York also prohibit planting anything but native plants on their public property. The planting of native plants on public land can help offset the escalating loss of natural habitats that are such a threat to our migratory birds.

As you may be aware, caterpillars make up approximately 95% of the diet of songbirds and other birds during breeding and nesting seasons. Caterpillars are “baby food” for baby birds. They are soft, high in protein and easy for baby birds to digest. Butterflies and moths are highly specialized in the selection of plants on which they lay their eggs which become caterpillars. You probably know that Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed plants; this specificity is largely true of all lepidoptera. No native plants – no caterpillars – no “baby food” for baby birds - --- dwindling populations of birds. You get the picture.

Now, the city of Asheville does not have any invasive non-native plants on its “Preferred Species” list, but as a member of the Public Works Department pointed out at a recent Asheville Tree Commission meeting: “Preferred means just that – it is not mandatory.” An ordinance would make this law and would protect the future as well as the current environment of Asheville for its citizens, visitors, birds and other fauna. To date we have secured the support of the following individuals and agencies for passage of this ordinance:

Bob Gale, Ecologist, MountainTrue
Julie Mayfield, Co-Director, MountainTrue and City of Asheville Councilwoman
Garrett Artz, Executive Director, RiverLink
Dawn Chavez, Executive Director, Asheville GreenWorks
Ken Czarnomski, President, Blue Ridge Naturalist Network

Phyllis Stiles, President, Bee City, U.S.A.
Stephen Hendricks, Commissioner, Asheville Tree Commission
Asheville Tree Commission
Asheville Tree Protection Task Force
Bill Jones, President, Carolina Native Nursery

The proposed ordinance has been recently revised (to be more comprehensive) and resubmitted to the Asheville Tree Commission for re-approval. If it passes that hurdle, the Commissioner will send it through the channels of local government before it is presented to the City Council. We will keep you informed of its progress through this process. I hope you will join us in letting City Council know that you care about our birds' environment and that you support the passage of this ordinance.

Cathy Walsh
Blue Ridge Naturalist
EMAS Board Member at large
Audubon Ambassador