

# EDITORIAL



## Plant Native Species

Douglas Tallamy, a distinguished professor of entomology and wildlife at the University of Delaware, and guest lecturer at Cary last Friday, laid to rest any doubt as to the environmental benefit of the All-American lawn, now measured in the millions of acres, as it has become a common landscape theme in the near universal suburb. It is a carpet of monocultural sterility, the very opposite of a natural biodiversity that is the mark of a healthy environment.

The point of his lecture was not just another complaint as to how we have abused our environment, but to offer a modest proposal to mitigate the sterility by introducing an important level of biodiversity. One of our errors in the suburban landscape, he points out, was to have imported alien species of trees, shrubs and perennials. They may look good, but they are not attractive to our native species of insects, the bottom of the food chain for our wildlife. By planting native plant species of we will provide the vegetable meals for insects, the basic source of protein for birds and small animals. Just one oak tree can support an ecosystem of insect life, and become a feeding ground for birds. Plant native bushes and perennials, and the insect population multiplies, as will our birds and small game. Replace our lawns with a combination of native trees, bushes, grasses and perennials, and we will have restored the biodiversity that once existed in our landscape before the bulldozer.

Tallamy's suggestion has an urgency. Our bird populations are declining. Loss of habitat is the near universal cause. Provide habitat and birds will survive. A great many of our bird species are threatened with extinction, perhaps a third. There are too few wild black cherry trees, oaks, willows, hickories and maples. The Bradford pear, Norway maple and Russian olive are particularly useless for birds and insects.

His message is both one of desperation, since we are on the brink, and of hope. It is a message worth hearing, and a cause well worth our heeding. It is a message that can be adopted by homeowners and public servants. School yards, public parks and playgrounds, roadside verges, these too can enhance our ecosystems by the planting and growing a mix of native species.