

*Bird Foraging Preferences and caterpillar Biomass on Suburban Woody landscape Trees*

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The purpose of my PhD project is to determine if birds prefer to forage for insects on native as opposed to non-native ornamental trees. Most birds, even those that eat seeds as adults, feed their young caterpillars. Caterpillars provide a high-energy food source in a convenient carrying package that can be easily fed to baby birds. The average homeowner does not want to encourage insects to live on their plants. However, encouraging backyard birds is a billion dollar business. If native vegetation, and its associated insects, attracts a greater number of birds, much of the general public could be encouraged to actively participate in creating a suburban environment that is both appealing to humans as well as to a large variety of insects and birds. To better understand these relationships, I have been comparing bird foraging frequency and caterpillar biomass on native and non-native landscape trees in suburban and park areas in southern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. Data collection began in Spring of 2007. At each site bird counts were conducted by both myself and volunteers on ten different species of commonly planted landscape trees. Simultaneously, caterpillar biomass for each tree was determined by collecting frass (caterpillar droppings). Frass was weighed and the individual pellets counted for each 24-hour period during bird counts.