

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

When most people think of invading aliens, they do not picture a beautiful flower or a graceful bird. But, in the United States, there are major problems caused by plants and animals that have come to this country from Asia or Europe, brought here either intentionally or unintentionally by human immigrants or visitors.

Perhaps it is easiest to understand the alien invasion in terms of our bird populations. Starlings and house sparrows both have "European" in their names for good reason. They have come here along with people who immigrated from Europe and have become quite widespread in American urban areas where other birds cannot compete with them for nesting places or food. Their natural enemies have not accompanied them to their new home. If one saw only starlings and house sparrows, would it not become quite boring to watch the birds?

Invasive plants are an even more ubiquitous problem. Early settlers brought many plants to the "new world" with them to use as medicines and foods and in the dying of cloth. They also accidentally carried many seeds along with them in their bedding, clothing, tools, and in the hay used to feed their animals. Ships carried soil as ballast, and we all know how many dormant seeds soil can contain. Scientists and horticultural specialists have often brought plants from foreign countries to study or to help create beautiful gardens. None of these introductions could be termed

Watch for alien invaders in your own backyard

"bad." However, we now have 10-20 percent of "wild" plants that grow in the eastern US that are not native to these shores.

Most introduced plants do not thrive outside of cultivation. Others simply grow within the natural system and create no discernible problems. A notable few have taken over natural habitats and are termed "noxious weeds" or "invasive exotics." These plants grow aggressively and spread rapidly. Usually, they have few insect or disease pathogens to keep them in check in their new environment. American animals have not developed a taste for them, and, therefore, they do not get eaten. They often produce large numbers of seeds which are dispersed easily and germinate prolifically. They take over an area, pushing out those native plants that provide food, nesting sites, and other habitat for our native birds and animals.

One of the most dangerous "invasive exotic" is the very beautiful purple loosestrife. It has taken over so many eastern wetlands that many ecologists consider it almost as big a threat to wetland species as draining or filling. The other plants in the swamp or marsh are crowded out, and waterfowl and other wetland animals decline as a result.

Delicate ecosystems such as wetlands or deserts are particularly susceptible to harm from alien species. It is estimated that of all the 958 federally endangered or threatened species 42 percent have been impacted by non-native species. The Nature Conservancy lists more than 170 species for which aliens (both plants and animals) are the major reason for their declines. When one considers that invasive plant

species spread to more than six square miles of US land owned by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management every single day, then one can get a view of the scale of this problem.

Home gardeners can do much to help decrease the problems caused by alien invaders. We can first refrain from the stubbornness that many Americans have developed in defense of non-native invasive species. (The mute swan — getting back to the birds — is one example of a very destructive but beautiful invader which is defended by the general population while it pushes out native waterfowl and muddies water for native fish.)

This spring let's begin replacing our non-native shrubs and perennials with viburnums, dogwoods, serviceberry, holly, cardinal flower, Joe-Pye weed, trumpet creeper, and any number of other colorful species (for suggestions, call the state university Cooperative Extension Service office near you). And, as you walk or drive around our area, if you see purple loosestrife in a ditch or swamp or along a stream, do the other wild-life a favor and pull it out by the roots. Do not put the plant into your compost pile; discard it with your trash. (If you are worried about the legality of this strategy, Article 8(h) of the 1992 International Convention on Biological Diversity is your justification.)

Inform your neighbors and friends about the dangers of purple loosestrife and other invasives such as Russian olive and garlic mustard. Encourage landscapers to use native flowers instead of supposedly harmless varieties of loosestrife and other imported ornamentals.



POST PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Big response to book drive

Eighth grade students at Gate of Heaven School filled the school's gymnasium with more than 5,000 used books they collected for Project Renaissance Inc., which sends used books to needy students in third world nations. Shown surrounded by some of the donations, from left; Jonathan Carroll and Brett Considine, foreground. Behind them; Stacy Koprowski, Janna Schmid, Meghan Reino, Jim Harkins, Brad Yocum, Chase Susko, Jim Chupka, Pat Austin, Jason Austin.

Meadows Auxiliary makes donation

The Auxiliary of the Meadows Nursing Center, Dallas, recently donated a Pulse Oximeter to the Rehabilitation Department at the center. This device is used to monitor residents' oxygen levels and pulse during therapy. Shown, from left, Midge Smith, Auxiliary President; Lois Keller, Auxilian; James Alaimo, Meadows Administrator; Cindy Lucarella, Rehab Dept. Team Leader demonstrating the oximeter with resident, Bernie Pape; and Diane Malonis, RN, Meadows director of Nursing.



Borough tax office closed March 15-29

Dallas Borough tax office, 68 Main Street, Dallas, will be closed Monday, March 15 to and including March 29, 1999. All taxes are in the discount period until April 15, 1999.

BIRTHS

NESBITT HOSPITAL
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HABIB, Victor and Deanna, Harveys Lake, a daughter, Feb. 27.
BOYLE, Patrick and Sandra, Dallas, a daughter, March 3.

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