



Maryland Office
2901 E. Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD 21214

February 26, 2024

To: Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce and members of the Maryland House Committee on Environment and Transportation

From: Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland HB 979 Invasive Plant Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Act)

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 979. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies aiming to protect both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. We work with partner organizations, government agencies, and local communities to protect birds and the places they need to survive now, and into the future. HB 979 will help the state of Maryland take the important step of limiting harmful, invasive plants from being propagated, purchased or sold in the state.

Invasive plants overrun our native habitats making them less diverse, more genetically unstable, and inhibiting the ability of indigenous plants to reproduce. Birds rely on Maryland's healthy native ecosystems, from forests to marshes to urban parks, for food, shelter, and nesting. We can prevent new infestations of invasive plants by maintaining and routinely monitoring a single Prohibited List and removing them from the ornamental trade, thereby preserving the survival of Maryland's birds, and maintaining their ability to perform the many ecosystem services on which we rely.

Invasive plants are one of the most significant threats to birds, both because of the habitat they impair and the impact they have on birds' most important food source: insects. 96% of terrestrial bird species eat insects at some point in their life cycle, and 90% of herbivorous insects are specialists, only able to eat one type of plant with which they coevolved. When invasive plants outcompete native plants, they hinder the ability of insects to find their host plant, resulting in the decimation of insect populations over the last 50 years. The result is a loss of 2.9 billion North American birds in that time, 86% of which are migratory, including our beloved Baltimore oriole. Birds require these specialist insects – up to 9,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chicks, for example – as an essential source of protein. The carotenoids in caterpillars – twice as abundant as in other insects – are responsible for the pigmentation in birds' feathers ... the blue in our Eastern bluebirds, the scarlet in our scarlet tanagers and the gold in our American goldfinches. Without native plants, we won't have insects, and therefore we won't have the beautiful birds that live, breed, and stopover in Maryland during their migration.

In addition to the loss of insects caused by invasive plants, migratory birds also suffer from the inadequate nutritional value provided by invasive berry-producing plants. For example, multiflora rose and Japanese honeysuckle, both invasive, have less than 1% fat in their berries. Compare that to the 40%, 48%, and 50% average fat content in the berries of native species of dogwood, viburnum, and

bayberry, respectively. This fat helps fuel birds' fall migration. Trace amounts of cyanide in the berries of invasive *Nandina domestica* have also been linked to mass deaths of migrating cedar waxwings, among others. *Nandina domestica*, or heavenly bamboo, is a common ornamental shrub.

From our Atlantic shoreline and Chesapeake Bay marshes to our urban parks and western Maryland mountains, birds in Maryland are under threat. They all travel through or live in areas under threat from invasive plants. HB 979 will create the groundwork for reducing these threats. The law will hold Maryland up as a leader in conservation planning for healthy ecosystems, protecting birds now and into the future.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

Thank You,

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Communities
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