20 January 2023

Dear Dr. Jos Barlow

Editor-in-Chief

Journal of Applied Ecology

Dear Dr. Jos Barlow and Editors at Journal of Applied Ecology,

We are submitting our manuscript titled “Plant species identity matters when comparing the trophic impacts of native and non-native plants: insights from a community-wide bird-exclusion experiment” for consideration as a Research Article in *Journal of Applied Ecology*. Non-native woody plants represent one of the most challenging issues in habitat restoration, with significant resources expended on control these invasives to improve outcomes for wildlife. Our manuscript builds on similar publications at *Journal of Applied Ecology* which inform invasive plant management, including Flory and Clay 2009, *Invasive plant removal method determines native plant community responses*, Kettenring and Adams 2011, *Lessons learned from invasive plant control experiments: a systematic review and meta-analysis,* and Weidlich et al. 2020, *Controlling invasive plant species in ecological restoration: a global review.*

As environmental practitioners managing a nature preserve, we noticed a significant gap in the assumptions underlying invasive plant management in forests of the northeastern US. While there is ample evidence that invasive plants can have lower food quality and quantity compared to native plants, does the comparison still hold for all native plants? To this end, we employed a predator exclusion experiment comparing bird predation effects across four non-native shrubs and locally abundant native trees and shrubs in the same habitat. This realistic comparison emulates the conditions in which local land trusts are pursuing invasive species control programs. To our surprise, native trees and shrubs experienced similar rates of bird predation effects. Variation in the quantity and quality of arthropod prey of non-native invasives encompassed the range of values seen on natives. In other words, some native plants were superior to invades while others were actually poorer food sources.

We believe this result to be incredibly important for habitat improve since it suggests that invasive plant removal could be detrimental in habitats where dominant native plants are actually poorer food resources for songbirds, while invasive plant removal would be suggested in habitats where native plants are higher quality. This more nuanced understanding of invasive plant management is important to our region, but also could inspire a similar perspective in other systems. We therefore believe the results reported in this manuscript will be engaging for the readership of *Journal of Applied Ecology*.

Thank you for your consideration,

Robert Clark & Chad Seewagen

Great Hollow Nature Preserve and Ecological Research Station