

**Plants for Birds:
Creating a Homegrown
National Park**

In his 2020 book, *Nature's Best Hope*, University of Delaware entomology professor and best-selling author Doug Tallamy proposes that we create a "Homegrown National Park" through our home landscapes. Our country has lost the habitat that birds need, and bird populations have declined by 2.9 billion in the U.S and Canada over the past 50 years. Our preserves are clearly not enough to sustain biodiversity.

In specifying how we create wildlife habitat in our own yards, Tallamy explains how *you need native plants to support native insects, particularly caterpillars, that birds feed on and feed to their young.* The best trees to support caterpillars and bird life was a major theme of Tallamy's best-selling 2007 book *Bringing Nature Home*.

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) February 18, 2021 talk by Dr. Tallamy, co-sponsored by Seminole Audubon Society along with the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, is available [on YouTube](#) and has 13K views!

Bird- and Butterfly-Friendly Plants for Central Florida

Tallamy's call to action is not only to create native habitat in your own yard but to educate others on it and to convince your neighbors to join in. Since we aired his presentation in 2021, Tallamy has been joined by a publicist who has built up the [Homegrown National Park](#) effort. If we plant natives, we are encouraged to "get on the map."



Wild Black Cherry in fruit. Photo: Mary Keim

by OAS member and native plant gardener Mary Keim with her husband Randy Snyder and others. From that resource, our most highly recommended native trees that promote bird life are:

Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) – trees in the genus *Prunus* are top choices for attracting fruit- and insect-eating birds; host for Eastern Tiger Swallowtail.

Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) – Florida's State Tree; nectar for pollinators; fruit for birds; host for Monk Skippers.

Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) – fruit and dense shelter for wildlife.

Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) – oaks are top choices to support caterpillars and thus insect-eating birds; acorns

Sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*) – This tree supports caterpillars for birds and the dry, sweet fruits are just the right size for small birds to eat.

Declines in Backyard Birds Linked to Use of Nonnative Plants

Especially during the breeding season, insect- and even seed- and nectar-eating birds depend on caterpillars—which are high in protein and calories—to feed their young. But many gardeners apply pest control to kill caterpillars on their plants. And most nonnative plants sold at nurseries are selected to resist feeding by caterpillars, often with inedible shiny, waxy leaves.

A study by the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the University of Delaware, funded by the National Science Foundation, directly linked the decline of a common bird species to reduced insect prey

from the use of nonnative plants in landscaping. The study showed that the Carolina Chickadee raises fewer or no young in landscapes dominated by nonnative plants. Chickadee populations can be sustained only if native plants make up more than 70 percent of plant biomass.

The study's lead author, a former grad student of Tallamy's Desiree Narango, explained "By using native plants, we can provide food for not only our common North American species, but we're also providing vital stopover habitat and resources for migratory birds during their perilous journeys."

Where to Buy Native Plants

The Florida Association of Native Nurseries lists nurseries and specific plants and has plenty of additional information: <https://www.fann.org/>

The Leu Gardens Plant Sale will be March 9th and 10th, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Look for the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) to buy from our good friends at Tarflower. Volunteers are experienced native plant gardeners and can help in your choices. The Cuplet Fern Chapter of the FNPS also has plant sales on [March 9th](#) and April 6th.

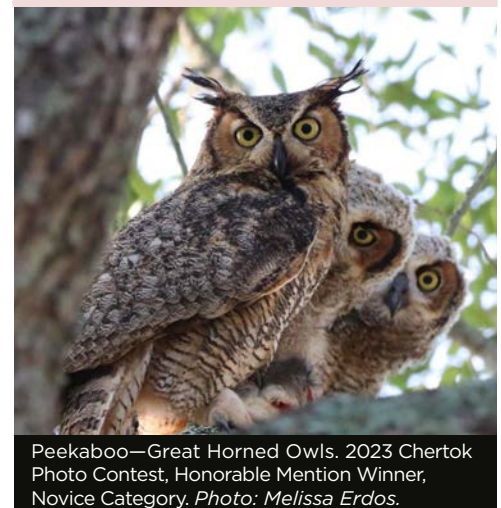
And when you are at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, check out the native landscape behind the welcome shelter. This garden was spearheaded by OAS board member Alan Shapiro. Let him know if you can help at alangrandiflora@gmail.com.

Natives are beautiful and support birds. *Deborah Green*



Carolina Chickadee at Sawgrass Island Preserve. Photo: Steve Shaluta.

Here is [OAS' list of plants](#) to make our Central Florida yards more bird- and butterfly-friendly, developed



Peekaboo—Great Horned Owls. 2023 Chertok Photo Contest, Honorable Mention Winner, Novice Category. Photo: Melissa Erdos.