

## Making Ripples

### “Horrible Honeysuckle”

by Amanda Bancroft

One mustn't beat around the bush about honeysuckle. There are many kinds of honeysuckle plants, but only one can rule them all: *Lonicera maackii* (Amur Honeysuckle or Bush Honeysuckle) is the ring to Sauron's finger. Or it would be, if he were an invasive-species-planting botanist instead of a dark lord.

Bush Honeysuckle is a common name that can also refer to the genus of three species of native North American deciduous shrubs, including the southern, northern, and mountain bush honeysuckles. The invasive non-native Amur honeysuckle was imported from Asia as ornamental erosion control in 1898 through the New York Botanical Garden. Disturbing the soil increases the likelihood that honeysuckle will invade the area.

If you live in China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea or southeastern Russia, good for you! You don't have to worry about honeysuckle throwing your back, or your backyard, out of balance. (In a twist of irony, in Japan Amur Honeysuckle is listed as an endangered species.) But if you live in Northwest Arkansas, then you've got a problem. Honeysuckle affects not just native plants and wildlife, but the public health, too.

A study by Washington University in St. Louis discovered that tick-borne diseases were more prevalent in suburban areas that had been invaded by Amur Honeysuckle, because deer density increased and concentrated more ticks in a smaller area near honeysuckle. Deer are attracted to honeysuckle for cover and browse. “Experimental removal of the plant was shown to reduce deer activity and number of infected ticks, through the shifting of ticks' blood meals away from deer,” the study showed. Areas of native vegetation had fewer pathogen-infected ticks.

The red, abundant berries do provide carbohydrates for birds and rodents, but this is inferior nutrition compared to the lipid-rich fruits from native species that can sustain the energy of migrating flocks of birds. Honeysuckle bushes provide seemingly good habitat for birds, but it actually threatens their eggs and young. That's because the honeysuckle's branches are easy to climb and make bird nests clearly visible from below, so feral cats, raccoons, and other nest predators have an advantage.

Amphibians are affected, too. Research published in the international ecological journal *Oecologia* found that chemicals produced by Amur Honeysuckle caused higher than usual rates of death in American Toad tadpoles, possibly by interfering with their respiratory systems.

These invasive bushes are notorious for leafing out earlier than most plants, shading out the understory so nothing else can grow in their extremely dense thickets, strangling out our native plants. This creates a shortage of native wildflowers and shrubs in a monoculture of honeysuckle.

MisterHoneysuckle.com, where you can buy DIY plans for a handy honeysuckle-removal tool called the “Popper,” has humorously noted the possibility of human strangling by honeysuckle creeping into one’s bedroom. “That is an exaggeration,” says Chris Grenner a.k.a. Mister Honeysuckle. “Honeysuckles strangle people only in daylight. Regardless, they must be stopped! First, find honeysuckle before it finds you.” Honeysuckle is indeed horrific, but by working together we can stop this invasive species and reverse its effects on our ecosystems. Visit [Invasive.org](http://Invasive.org) for more information and removal tactics.

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