



## Native Trees are Critically Important for Feeding Baby Birds

### Food Web: Trees, Leaves, Caterpillars, Birds

In Spring, birds are mating, nesting, laying and hatching eggs, and hunting from sunrise to sunset to feed their newborn chicks. That takes a lot of energy, and it requires a special diet.

Baby birds can't eat seeds or berries. They need the protein and other nutrition found only in insects. And, though baby birds will eat a variety of insects, their favorite food is caterpillars, the larvae of moths and butterflies. Caterpillars are soft, easily digested, and loaded with nutrients. Bird parents need thousands of caterpillars to raise even a single clutch of babies.

### Caterpillars, quite literally, grow on trees – but only on native trees!

For example, not one species of caterpillar has been observed growing to maturity (to become a moth or butterfly) on Norway Maple, an introduced tree. Many native trees are hosts for hundreds of different species of caterpillars, producing lots of bird food.

River Birch (*Betula nigra*) is a favorite as a landscape plant, and its crazy bark holds a variety of insects that attract woodpeckers all winter. Chickadees, warblers, wrens, and many other songbirds hunt and find caterpillars in the leaves of birch trees.

### Native Species of Plants, Trees and Wildlife Adapted to their Local Ecoregion and Support One Another

There is a strong, ecological connection between native plants and the insect and animal world, especially the bird population.

