

Davis generates debate with essay on invasive species

Do invasive species deserve their bad reputation? Mark Davis, DeWitt Wallace Professor and chair of Macalester's biology department, tackles that question in a *Nature* essay he published with 18 other ecologists, and it's garnering international buzz.

The group contends that it's time to shift away from a narrow "nature versus alien" dichotomy to a more realistic view of non-native species—some of which, the group suggests, actually increase biodiversity in their new environment.

That argument is a controversial one, both in scientific circles and in mainstream media outlets, which have long featured alarmist headlines about invasive species such as the Great Lakes zebra mussel and the emerald ash borer. Davis emphasizes that while some non-native species do cause major problems in their new environments, a more nuanced approach is necessary, especially since many non-native species alter an ecosystem but do not damage it.

By the essay's June 9 publication date, the essay garnered immediate attention and has already been covered by *Scientific American*, *Wired*, and *Discover Magazine*, among other publications. Davis has given interviews to media outlets around the world ranging from Radio Australia to German Public Radio. Hear him discuss his findings on the magazine's weekly *Nature Podcast*. (<http://www.nature.com/nature/podcast/index-2011-06-09.html>)

Davis, a plant ecologist, has written extensively about restoration ecology, succession ecology, and climate change. The Oxford University Press published his book on the invasive species issue, *Invasion Biology*, in 2009. Since arriving at Macalester in 1981, Davis has collaborated with dozens of Macalester students on research at the Cedar Creek Natural History Area, with support from National Science Foundation grants. He is also currently leading students in research at the Macalester field station 17 miles from campus, the Katharine Ordway Natural History Study Area.

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