Urban Biodiversity Gains
New Converts

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Cities around the world are conserving species and restoring habitat.

Nature is being brought back into urban life—and that bodes well for efforts to conserve global diversity. Cities are supporting a range of efforts, including restoring watersheds; expanding and linking conserved areas; encouraging green roofs and local green gardening; reintroducing native fauna and flora to parks and walkways; removing the constructed covers over brooks, streams, and rivers (referred to as daylighting waterways); and encouraging educational outreach programs and green architectural design. From Stockholm and Malmo in Sweden to Copenhagen, Denmark; Curitiba, Brazil; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco; Chicago; New York City; and Singapore, cities are revitalizing the potential for biodiversity.

There is much new thinking going on. Timothy Beatley, University of Virginia professor of environmental and urban planning, extends biophilia—biologist E. O. Wilson’s term for an inherent human affinity for other species and natural communities—to city planning. His “biophilic cities” steward and restore their natural and cultivated biodiversity. Beatley details this urban vision in Biophilic Cities: Integrating Nature into Urban Design and Planning. “My vision of a vibrant, compact, walkable, sustainable city has within and without it lots of nature—horizontally, vertically in all the spaces of the city,” he said in an interview. New parks are being planted with native species, and many experts write about the health benefits of urban biodiversity. “With nature in the city,” Beatley explains, “we are more social and healthier. Nature… is uniquely suited to bring us together.”

Urban biodiversity got a boost in October 2012, when the Cities for Life Summit convened for the second time. The summit was held in Hyderabad, India, in conjunction with the biennial Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Attended by over 500 people, including over 60 mayors or municipal leaders, the Cities for Life Summit showcased the CBD-requested report...