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Perceptions and Social Divers of Urban Residents on Wildlife Gardening: A Case Study of Residential Landscapes in Gampaha District

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Abstract

Urbanization has limited the connectedness of humans with nature in their day-to-day lives, thereby elevating the conservation value of residential landscapes. Thus, residential gardens act as hidden treasures ensuring the ecological resilience in urban environments. However, attitudes and other socio-economic drivers of urban dwellers on wildlife conservation plays a critical role in shaping the ecological role of urban residential gardens. Therefore, the present study was conducted to assess the perceptions and social divers of urban residents on wildlife gardening in the District of Gampaha. Hundred and fifty households located in the three highest populated Divisional Secretariats (Gampaha, Mahara and Negombo) in Gampaha District were selected randomly. The socio-demographic details and the perceptions of residents on facilitating the wildlife in their gardens were assessed through a pre-tested interviewer administrated questionnaire. The Chi-square test of association was used to identify the significant socio-economic factors that influenced the wildlife gardening related practices in residential gardens. Among the respondents, 38.1% were 36 to 50 years old, while the majority (55.7%) had completed the Advanced level as the highest academic qualification. Even though wildlife gardening was not familiar to the majority (77.6%), 95% of respondents preferred to see small wildlife in their gardens. Around 56% of the respondents were occasionally spending their time enjoying the wildlife. The majority of households (69.4%) had used various methods to facilitate wildlife in their garden, which were limited to birdbaths and feeding areas. According to the observation of the respondents, 1st rank was given to squirrels followed by birds and butterflies as the most visited small wildlife categories to the residential gardens. The majority of respondents (74.5%) were in strong agreement that observing wildlife in their gardens positively affect their wellbeing by reducing stress, however, only 14% had a positive intention in altering the gardening practices to attract wildlife. Restrictions in time, knowledge/information and garden size were the top three barriers for wildlife gardening among the surveyed residents. According to the Chi-square test, age and employment were significantly associated ($p < 0.05$) with the time spent on enjoying wildlife, while only land area of the garden and income significantly ($p < 0.05$) influenced the perception of wildlife gardening. The present study denoted that, urban residents already value the contribution of wildlife in their lives. Yet, there is a knowledge gap to facilitate wildlife in urban settings, where increasing awareness of wildlife gardening and its intangible benefits would support urban biodiversity.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Perception, Residential gardens, Urbanization, Wildlife gardening