DOES WILD **FLORA HAVE A PLACE IN CITIES?**

Quote as: Hernández, M. Does Wild Flore Have a Place in Cities? P. 250. In: Mejía, M.A., Amaya-Espinel, J.D. (eds.). *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities with Biodiversity.* Bogotá. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. 2022. 288 pages.

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When speaking of flora and urban biodiversity, categories include native, exotic, endemic, cosmopolitan, threatened, invasive, ornamental, etc. A variety that has been much less explored, at least in Colombia, is that of *spontaneous or wild* species, as opposed to those species cultivated by humans.

Wild is not synonymous with native. Although many wildlife species are native, not all are. Introduced species can also become established in the wild (naturalized) and continue to grow and reproduce after that without human help.

Is wildlife important in cities? When it comes to fauna, there is less doubt because we recognize that in addition to having "cultivated" fauna such as cats, dogs, and other domestic animals in a city, its counterpart is also essential; having wild birds in parks, wild butterflies visiting flowers, and wild earthworms incorporating organic matter into the soil.

With flora, on the other hand, the subject seems new and seldom discussed. A large percentage of the flora (both in the number of species and biomass) found in cities is cultivated.

What is the wild flora of cities? It is composed of individual plants that grow independently, without being planted, and often without being cared for by people. They can be wild grasses that grow between the cracks in the ground; weeds that grow spontaneously in gardens where the soil has been turned over. They can be trees or shrubs that grew on their own in empty lots. They can be spontaneous epiphytes on tree branches. And they can be a wide variety of species present in remnants of native ecosystems that have survived or have been protected within cities and on their outskirts.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF WILD FLORA IN CITIES?

One of the most straightforward answers is that wild plantlife is different from cultivated plantlife. Its very presence adds a great variety of species, niches, and possibilities that do not exist in environments where only cultivated plants dominate. Thus, the presence of wild plantlife increases the biodiversity of a place.

And this increase may be surprising. The project "Flora Silvestre de Bogotá" on the "Naturalista" platform has collected more than 5000 observations made by almost 900 citizens in the Bogotá-Soacha conurbation area in the last four years. These records correspond to about 300 species of vascular plants that grow wild in the area and are an essential part of its biodiversity.

Wild species can form critical associations with wild organisms. In Bogotá, for example, wildflowers such as cat´s ear (*Taraxacum officinale*) and cat´s ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*) are among the most important nectar sources for native butterflies in the city. The "chusque" (*Chusquea scandens*), a wild plant of cold climate, present on the edges of Bogotá, towards the eastern hills, is the only plant on which dozens of native butterflies feed when they are caterpillars. The presence of this wild plant determines whether or not dozens of other fauna species can exist in the urban environment.

Here we encourage you to see the wild as a complement to what is cultivated, not an antagonist. Urban biodiversity needs both. If the emphasis here is on the wild, it is because, in cities, we usually pay more attention to what is cultivated. The wild is seen only as "weeds"; where "there is nothing" or "where there are bugs." We give full prominence to the planted tree, to the garden flower. We must now create a world where the "place with the bugs" and the planted tree can meet and intertwine.