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U.S. Forest Service and Partners Deliver Urban Wildlife Research in Support of Conservation and Management

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Urban wildlife contributes to the vibrancy of our cities, adds value to the places we live and allows urban residents to connect with nature without driving hours to a protected reserve. Land and water conservation projects have the potential to serve as a refuge for species impacted by urbanization, and in so doing, strengthening the connection between the growing urban human population with wildlife, potentially broadening support for global conservation efforts and delivering valuable ecosystem services to support dense urban populations (DeStefano and DeGraaf 2003; USDA Forest Service 2014).

The U.S. Forest Service has actively engaged in wildlife conservation in cities and suburbs for decades. The ground-breaking 1973 publication by Forest Service scientists Jack Ward Thomas and Richard DeGraaf, together with Robert Brush, titled “Invite Wildlife to Your Backyard” urged homeowners to create habitat in their yards and provided instructions on how to incorporate features into their landscape (Thomas et al. 1973). Today, Forest Service scientists use animal population surveys, behavior analysis, and habitat modeling to determine how urban development can best coexist with native wildlife. In addition, researchers engage with citizen scientists to collect valuable data and provide meaningful experiences in scientific research (USDA Forest Service 2013). In many cases, urban areas are facing new wildlife conflicts that did not previously exist, forcing managers to think about habitat conservation for the first time. These issues arise when cities expand into natural areas at the wildland urban interface, or when animals that have been locally absent for decades repopulate older cities. In both of these situations, a coordinated management framework may not yet be in place that allows for effective policymaking and implementation. The Forest Service and many other conservation partners work across organization and disciplinary boundaries to deliver science that promotes native wildlife habitat and diverse, viable, and robust wildlife populations in urban areas.

Urban wildlife sessions and symposia have gained popularity in professional meetings (e.g., The Ecological Society of America and The Wildlife Society), yet have not reached their full potential to actively engage with practitioners. The annual *North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference* provides a valuable setting to showcase Federal, NGO and local municipal efforts to engage growing urban populations in wildlife conservation and to effectively manage urban habitats to provide natural resource benefits to wildlife and people. Since 2013, the U.S. Forest Service, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Wildlife Federation, and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department have co-sponsored half-day workshops on urban wildlife research and management for the *North American* conference. Motivation for these “Urban Wildlife in Cities and Suburbs” sessions came out of an acknowledgement of the changing demographics of the United States to a more urban population, combined with the need to bring relevant urban wildlife research, funding strategies, and successful management practices to conservation and management professionals. These sessions target Federal and State agencies, non-profit organizations and municipal governments. Expert panels highlight the importance of urban wildlife conservation, current research, human-

wildlife interactions, opportunities for engaging new constituencies, and case studies of successful urban wildlife conservation in action. Topics covered by the speakers have included landscape-scale habitat conservation, local municipal sustainability plans in Baltimore and Denver, and the use of native landscaping to provide bird habitat in residential yards.¹

The articles in this special section of *Cities and the Environment* represent urban wildlife research across diverse taxa, topics and landscapes, including work inspired by the “Urban Wildlife in Cities and Suburbs” workshops at the North American conferences. The Forest Service and its partners will continue to ensure that such valuable research frameworks and empirical findings are made available to land managers and conservation professionals as we face new challenges and opportunities in urban wildlife conservation and management.

References

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¹ Information about previous and future workshops can be found at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/research/urban/wildlife-workshops/>