

# BASIC ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE LEFT BEHIND IN THE URBAN GREENING RUSH

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**There is no longer an “outside” of cities - the importance of members of the public in making urban landscapes hospitable for life.**

Our cities' impact is now so widespread that it is hard to find a place unaffected by, or outside of, a city. Cities themselves are hostile places to be, for humans that don't earn enough to access the comforts of city life and for plants and animals that were never part of the urban design. In the next ten years, we need to make our cities as resilient and hospitable as possible by building networks of public green spaces that improve access to a healthy environment with clean air, clean water, and open green spaces to exercise. And, we need to enable a return of the plants and animals that our cities have displaced. For many plants and animals, if they do not find a home inside existing urban developments or as part of new urban design, they will soon have no home at all.

Facing this challenge requires many hands on deck, and it is encouraging to see a wider diversity of people and organizations improving the health of their urban environment. In particular, greening and gardening groups shape a large area of the public and private urban landscape. They have enormous potential to restore the urban landscape and make it more comfortable and hospitable for humans and urban ecosystems.

I am, however, concerned that the environmental field has become too professional on the one hand and remained too amateurish on the other. So we are left with a significant gap in

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professional and amateur understanding where basic ecological knowledge and urban restoration principles should be. From my point of view, there is enormous potential in making basic - but profound - ecological knowledge readily available and, in so doing, upgrading all the busy gardeners and tree-planters into ecosystem restorers. But to do this, it is critical to take the efforts of amateurs and professionals from outside the ecological field seriously and give people the knowledge to take their environmental health into their own hands.

I have spent the last three years working with colleagues in Cape Town on the Fynbos Stepping-stone Corridor Strategy, paired with a 6-step framework and an open-source website ([www.fynboscorridors.org](http://www.fynboscorridors.org)) that has useful tools for would-be gardeners and greeners. These are my favorite groups of people to work with because they are so passionate and joyful in their work. However, they are often without access to the ecological history of their areas and how these unique, local ecosystems function. And so, their methods

are often based on gardening aesthetics or pieces of ecological knowledge borrowed from elsewhere. It is, therefore, common for these groups and organizations to implement interventions that reproduce ecologies from other parts of the world rather than restore their local and unique ecology.

The first step we took to address this was to enfold the gardening world into the restoration world by organizing and sharing the scientific knowledge of local ecologies and restoration with the public. This knowledge needs to be refined into hands-on workshops, art, imagery, and music to further the cause. This next step is crucial for ecological justice and making a healthy and beautiful urban life possible for all citizens.

Our work in Cape Town shows that local gardeners, green activists, and concerned citizens can contribute to strategic and effective ecological restoration within their city. Let's capitalize on their enthusiasm and energy and build solid ecological networks within more cities worldwide together!

