SHADOWS IN THE MOONLIGHT

The Secret Lives of Forgotten Pollinators and Gardens of the Night

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PARTNERSHIP berger

As part of the global movement to become Biodiversity Positive, supporting the urban ecosystem has become a well-accepted design strategy. However, seldom do these strategies consider the natural world at night. With the goal of preserving the world's biodiversity in response to the urgency of climate change, designers must confront their "daytime bias" and deeply examine the idea that "half of any place is after dark."

As habitat loss and development leads to more urban wildlife, the pervasive issue of light pollution in urban ecosystems underscores the urgent need for urban rewilding through mitigation. Light pollution severely disrupts the natural behaviors of wildlife and ecosystem functions, leading to habitat fragmentation and reduced biodiversity. In addition, the lack of natural darkness takes away our low-light vision ability and non-visual senses, which strengthens our daytime bias.

By viewing our cities through the lens of darkness and nocturnal wildlife, we can transform these familiar places and challenge our perspectives of the ordinary. Case in point: gardens and urban farms are often designed to support daytime pollinators such as butterflies, diurnal bees, and birds. By expanding considerations to nocturnal pollinators like bats and moths, we can make our urban spaces more ecologically sound and resilient.

Seattle is home to several species of nocturnal pollinators, as well as numerous environmentally critical areas (ECAs). By considering the locations of existing public community gardens (called P-Patches) near ECA buffers, a location was selected for a small-scale intervention to explore how a nocturnal pollinator-friendly moon garden could be created in the city.

The overlap of a power-transmission right-of-way with the selected location of the moon garden further inspired research into the design limitations for the site. Based on the utility company's guidelines for height and access restrictions to the ROW and examples of integrated vegetation management in a powerline ROW, the design leverages the open space to envision a multi-block habitat corridor that complies with the utility requirements. Though this moonlight garden will not be built, the exploration hopes to inspire others to find spaces in their own cities for nocturnal habitat and its residents.

Landscape architects have a crucial role in designing and advocating for outdoor spaces that respect and accommodate the needs of nocturnal pollinators and wildlife by rethinking our approach to nighttime design, and where darkness should be preserved or reintroduced. Through thoughtful design practices, we can create environments that restore ecological balance, preserve biodiversity, provide refuge for wildlife, highlight the precious yet often invisible parts of the natural world, and promote healthier coexistence for all that live right at our doorsteps.