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MEDIA RELEASE

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There are many benefits of bringing nature back into urban areas, but new research shows that besides using the right species for the local environment, their social acceptability, economic use and Indigenous significance need to be carefully considered.

‘Nature in all its forms provides a remarkable range of benefits in cities,’ said Dr Luis Mata, from RMIT’s Interdisciplinary Conservation Science Research Group. ‘There is great enthusiasm to bring trees, shrubs, grasses, insects, spiders, birds and mammals back into urban areas. Nature-based solutions such as green roofs and pop-up parks are happening across the world.’

Dr Mata said benefits include improving people’s physical and psychological health, protection from future climate change, and conservation of threatened species. ‘Nature-based solutions re-enchanted people with nature, which helps them appreciate and conserve nature outside cities as well. Also, nature in cities connects people with the local Indigenous culture and history.’

However, Dr Mata said that the theory of benefiting from bringing nature back is one thing, but landscape designers, architects, health practitioners and others need to incorporate all aspects of nature in deciding how to bring it back.

‘Broader planning is required before development. We’re in need of biodiversity-sensitive urban design, where developers specifically aim to deliver on-site biodiversity benefits.’

Dr Mata and his colleagues have developed a new decision-making tool that includes the ecological feasibility of each species, its conservation value, economic use, cultural significance in the context of Indigenous culture, and social acceptability.

‘We want to see all these things included in decisions about what nature to bring back into cities. For example, people deciding on re-naturing actions need to guarantee that the nature coming back is not harmful, and that the targeted species are charismatic and attractive to people.’

Dr Mata said that as cities grow globally, bringing nature back to them will be increasingly relevant for future generations. ‘Protecting and bringing nature back into cities is a major sustainability goal. Future generations of an ever-increasing population of urban residents are relying on it.’

Dr Mata’s work contributes to the National Environmental Science Program - Clean Air and Urban Landscapes Hub (NESP-CAUL). He presented his results to EcoTAS 2017, the joint conference of

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the Ecological Society of Australia and the New Zealand Ecological Society, held this week in the Hunter Valley.

More information, including photos: Simon Torok, 0409 844 302; simon@scientell.com.au ^[2]

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