

Review by Anita Tikoo Matange, Landscape Architect  
| vinyas.arch@gmail.com

# URBAN PARK DESIGN

## A NEW PARADIGM



### BIODIVERSITY PARKS NATURE RESERVES OF DELHI

Chief Editors: Prof. C.R. Babu and  
Rajeev Kr. Tiwari

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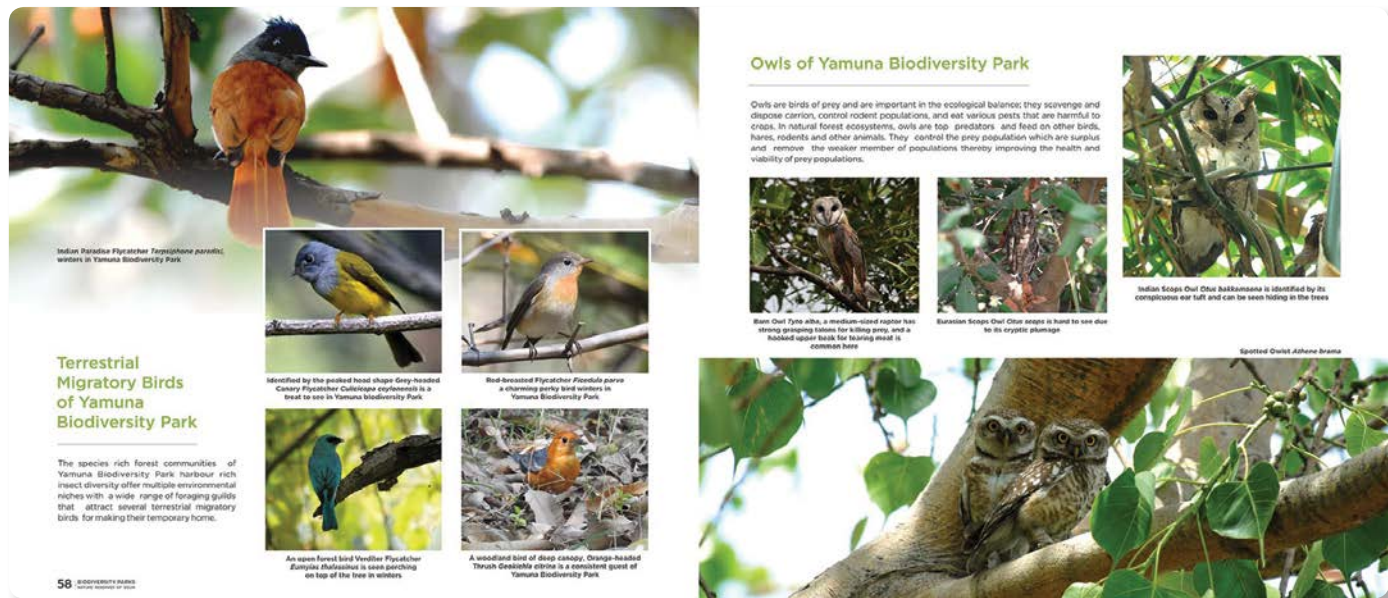
The E book showcases Delhi's seven Biodiversity Parks, conceptualized in different eco-zones, highlighting ecological importance, design challenges, and the need for collaboration between landscape architects and ecologists.

*Biodiversity Parks – Nature Reserves of Delhi* documents the development of Delhi's seven Biodiversity Parks through photographs and text. The idea for Biodiversity Parks came about in 2001 at a conference organised by the Dept. of Environment (NCT), and the Center for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems (CEMDE). Yamuna Biodiversity Park, inaugurated in 2012, was the first among Delhi's seven.

Biodiversity has been missing too long from Public Park Design discourse. This book puts biodiversity at the center of park design. The Editors claim that these Parks follow a unique concept and are global models of urban environmental conservation. While the effort in the planning and implementation of the Parks is noteworthy, the idea of an urban wilderness park itself is not unique. What is novel is the term – Biodiversity + Park – a reaction, perhaps, to 150 years of a predominantly ornamental approach to park design in New Delhi. With or without the prefix, a park refers to public open-spaces incorporating a diversity of flora, fauna, and activities.

*“A park is an area of natural, semi-natural or planted space set aside for human enjoyment and recreation, or for the protection of wildlife or natural habitats”*

– Wikipedia



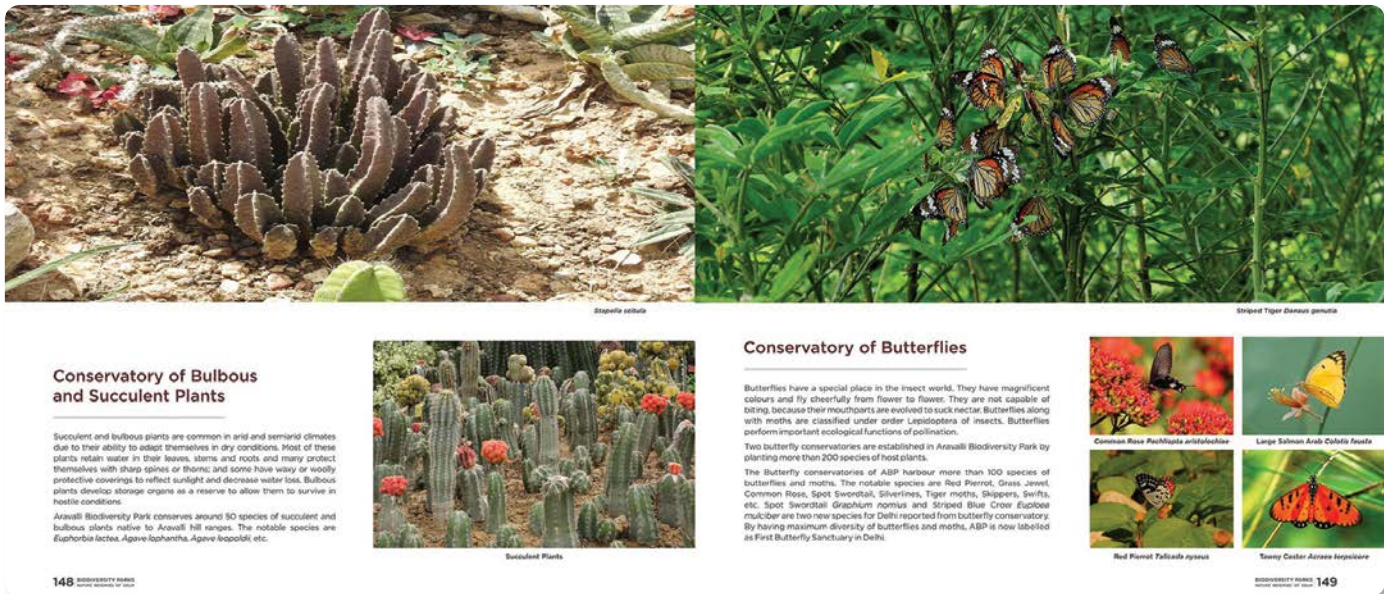
The book is divided into five Chapters. The short first two Chapters define what constitutes a Biodiversity Park and include random lists and flowcharts. Chapter 4 includes broad notes on biodiversity, herbs, rare plants, and animals. Chapter 5 is a short collection of visitor feedback and press coverage.

Chapter 3 presents in some detail each of the seven Parks said to form a network. There is a dedicated sub-section for each park with a brief discussion of attributes such as the spread, and numbers and varieties of plants and animal species. The least one would expect for each case study is a colourful centre-spread layout plan. The plans, where included, are so minuscule (and without text) as to be pointless (pardon the pun). While each case study follows a different outline, colourful infographics at the beginning and end of each provide order and orientation. How the seven parks connect to function as a network is not clear. Occasionally, you come across a page explaining a restoration approach (canopy-opening and cut rootstock method, pg. 197). Detailed documentation of specific challenges and innovative approaches towards degraded landscapes would have added to the value of the book.

The book is filled with stunning colour pictures that do little to illustrate the design approach. Before and after pictures present the dramatic transformation. Additional pictures showing intermediary transitional stages would help the reader appreciate the patience and perseverance landscape restoration projects demand.

The seven parks are all located either in the Ridge or in the Floodplains, ignoring completely the Flatlands, the third major landform of Delhi. A systemic design approach would have revealed the Matrix to surely be as important as the Cores it connects. Without the Matrix there is no Network. Perhaps the eighth park will cover this missing link.

It is clearly stated at the outset that the book is a simple photographic record and makes no claims at being a technical document. Yet, at times, it tries to be a design manual such as when listing landscape elements to include in the different zones of a Biodiversity Park. Is an Orchidarium really necessary in a Biodiversity park? Perhaps the list is meant



to be suggestive and not read as a guide. Why include it at all, in that case. How does an Orchidarium that relies on a sprinkler system for survival fit into the overall scheme of a restored habitat? Can any habitat be truly “restored”? What constitutes a degraded habitat? These issues may, perhaps, be too technical for a coffee table book but warrant serious discussion to mainstream approaches to habitat conservation and open space planning in the country.

In the absence of any previous documentation of Public Parks, this record of Delhi’s seven landmark Biodiversity Parks is invaluable. The core planning concept marks a paradigm shift in park-design in India. What the book also ends up highlighting is the chasm between the two fields closely involved in park design – Landscape Architecture and Ecology. And therein lies a difficult challenge for our community; our image needs a makeover. Landscape Architecture, in India, continues to be looked upon as a field far removed from the natural landscape. While our ecologists draw too hard a line between Nature and her Urban manifestation, in reality, the city is but a Park, and would benefit immensely from the two communities joining hands and working as allies.

Change is coming. In Delhi and her neighbourhood are little smatterings of projects that are benefiting from the teamwork of landscape architects and ecologists working together to create spaces that include human recreational needs while protecting ecological functions. Ecologists must not forget that Delhi’s Biodiversity Parks are but human interventions at managing biodiversity. Any intervention that requires planning infrastructure, whether green or built, will benefit from the formal help of professionals trained in the field of Site Planning, read Landscape Architects.

The Biodiversity Parks are fast “emerging as the capital’s most visited public places” and a professional approach to their design, documentation, and implementation with landscape architects as lead consultants, will only make this experiment better.



**Biodiversity Parks**  
Nature Reserves of Delhi



<https://www.dda.gov.in/sites/default/files/Landscape/BiodiversityParksNatureReservesofDelhi.pdf>