

# Modeling understory shrub diversity related to environmental gradients using Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) in an urban forest in Jakarta, Indonesia

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**Abstract.** Kirana GR, Wibowo AA, Nurdin E, Wardhana W, Basukriadi A. 2023. Modeling understory shrub diversity related to environmental gradients using Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) in an urban forest in Jakarta, Indonesia. *Asian J For* 7: 75-81. The urban forest is one form of human-made ecosystem in urban environments. One of the most important components of urban forest ecosystem is understory shrubs. The sustainability of understory shrub community is supported by environmental variables suitable to its growth. Nonetheless, there has been limited information on how environmental variables contribute to the presence of shrubs in particular urban settings. This study aims to model the relationships between understory shrub diversity and environmental covariates, including air temperature, humidity, light intensity and wind speed, using the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) in Srengseng Urban Forest, Jakarta, Indonesia. The result showed that there were 20 species and 12 families with the most common shrub species being *Rivina humilis*, followed by *Acalypha siamensis*, *Cordyline fruticosa*, *Syzigium paniculatum* and *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*. The average Shannon-Wiener diversity index was 0.671 (95% CI: 0.441, 0.901). The AIC models showed that understory shrub diversity was negatively correlated with humidity and positively correlated with light gradients with AIC values of 38.696 and 41.679, respectively. The diversity of understory shrubs in urban forests was significantly supported by sufficient light intensity ( $R^2 = 0.29$ ) and limited by an increase in air humidity ( $R^2 = -0.44$ ). The humidity and light intensity combinations also affect the understory shrub diversity (AIC = 38.900,  $R^2 = 0.256$ ). The results of these studies can help urban forest managers manage urban forests if aiming for biodiversity conservation, especially understory shrub species.

**Keywords:** AIC, correlation, light intensity, *Rivina humilis*, urban

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing trend of urbanization drives the development of cities across the world, resulting in the fast expansion of urban areas, which has an impact on many aspects of the ecosystem, including vegetation diversity (Theodorou et al. 2020). Despite the human-made ecosystem, urban areas are known to have distinct and unique vegetation diversities (Clemants and Moore 2003). Urban ecosystems, such as parks, gardens and urban forests, are extensively used for leisure and physical activity in urban settings to enhance human health and well-being. Through the planning and management of urban ecosystems, including social, cultural, and economic elements, they play a vital role in conserving world biodiversity.

Among the vegetation occurring in urban ecosystems, understory shrubs are an essential component which forms the lower layer of vegetation with various ecological and socio-cultural functions, from mitigating the risk of erosion to enhancing landscape beauty. Because of the small stature, understory shrubs in urban ecosystems can consist of relatively a large number of biodiversity within a limited urban space, compared to, for example, trees. Understory shrubs have also been widely utilized to assess and define

community and ecosystem conservation status (Pyšek et al. 2012), as well as to understand future responses to climate change (Foxcroft et al. 2017).

The functionality and ecological integrity of understory shrubs in an urban ecosystem can be inferred from various parameters. Species diversity, vegetation structure and composition, and biological indices are most commonly used biological parameters crucial for species conservation at the community (Jeschke et al. 2014) and ecosystem levels (Tobin 2018). These parameters provide information regarding community dynamics, dispersion adaptation, and even the potential of understory shrubs to compete for establishment (Birch and Wachter 2011). Understanding the understory shrub spatial distribution patterns in urban forests through the application of biological indices including Shannon-Wiener diversity index ( $H'$ ) (Downey and Richardson 2016) is critical for the creation and execution of understory shrub management and conservation plans (Guiaşu and Tindale 2018). More recently, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) has been used to model the correlations between environmental gradients with plant diversity. According to Barajas et al. (2020), environmental gradients, such as elevation and temperature, are collinear. Among the environmental gradient covariates, climatic heterogeneity has the strongest

effect on plant species richness and elevational heterogeneity on plant species endemism.

Understanding the association between understory shrub diversity and environmental factors requires statistical analyses. In diversity-environmental factor relationships, researchers typically employ observational studies containing a high number of explanatory environmental factors to explain a particular pattern of diversity. Researchers have traditionally relied on hypothesis testing to include or exclude environmental factors in regression models to illustrate such associations, albeit the outcomes typically depend on the approach utilized based on forward, backward, and stepwise selection. Even though improved tools became available in the mid-1970s, they are still neglected in several domains, particularly in plant ecology studies. This is the case with the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), which outperforms hypothesis-based approaches in model selection (i.e., variable selection). In comparison to current statistical analyses, AIC is straightforward to compute and understand, but more crucially, it gives a measure of the strength of evidence for each model that represents a reasonable biological hypothesis relative to the whole collection of models investigated for a given data set. Using this method, a weighted average of the estimate and standard error for any given environmental factor of interest over all models investigated can be computed. This method, known as model-averaging or multimodel inference, produces precise and robust estimates to elaborate the association between environmental factors with the understory shrub diversity in this study. As a result, plant ecology studies have used AIC to elaborate environmental gradient impacts on plant community

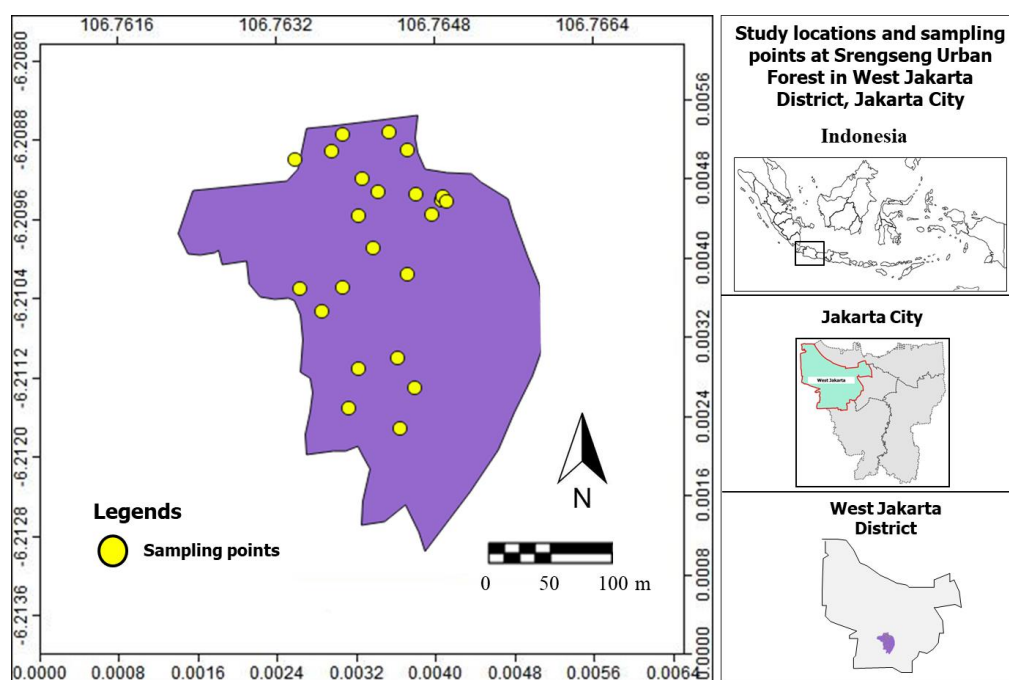
including temperature (Parain et al. 2018) and total N, available K, available P, and soil organic matter (Hou et al. 2019)

In Jakarta Province, Indonesia, Srengseng Urban Forest is one of important urban ecosystems. The vegetation in this urban forest, particularly tree diversity, has been studied by Sari et al. (2022). Nonetheless, there is still a limited information about the understory shrub diversity and its environment determinant factors. This study aims to estimate the diversity of understory shrubs in the Srengseng Urban Forest in Jakarta Province. The novelty of this research lies in the use of AIC model to assess the link between environmental variables with the understory shrub diversity. The results of these efforts, as mentioned by English et al. (2022), can aid urban forest managers in supporting urban forest management and the conservation of biodiversity. Promoting understory shrub biodiversity in the Srengseng Urban Forest can be a potential conservation priority given the unique potential of the understory shrubs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study area and period

The study was located at Srengseng Urban Forest in West Jakarta City, Jakarta Province, Indonesia (Figure 1). The geographical coordinates for Srengseng Urban Forest were  $106.7616^{\circ}$ - $106.7664^{\circ}$  E and  $6.2080^{\circ}$ - $6.2136^{\circ}$  S. This forest has an extent of  $104,461 \text{ m}^2$  with elevation of 7 m above sea level. The monthly rainfall ranges  $35.8 - 604.4 \text{ mm}^3$ . The study was conducted from October to November 2022.



**Figure 1.** Map of study area and sampling points at Srengseng Urban Forest in West Jakarta City, Jakarta Province, Indonesia

## Procedures

### Understory shrub survey

The survey of understory shrub followed methods by Pourbabaei and Haghgooy (2012), Siregar et al. (2020), and Khan et al. (2021). An understory shrub survey at sampling locations was implemented using grids sized 2x2 m. Those sampling points were distributed randomly across the study area, resulting a total sampling points of 24. Within the sampling points, all shrub species were observed, collected, and counted for the number of individuals. The geocoordinates of sampling points were recorded using a Global Positioning System (GPS) Garmin Etrex handheld. The recorded geocoordinate data was then tabulated in a table.

### Environmental variable survey

Environmental variables were measured directly in the field in the 24 sampling points. The environmental variables included air temperature ( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), relative humidity/RH (%), wind (m/s), and light intensity (lux).

### Data analysis

Data analysis included the calculation of diversity using Shannon-Wiener index and modeled using Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). Other quantifications of data were presented as histogram graphics and tabular presentations. Correlations were performed using Pearson correlation values as  $R^2$ .

### Diversity analysis

The diversity of understory shrub (Matius et al. 2018) in Srengseng Urban Forest was indicated by Shannon-Wiener index (Bhat et al. 2014) and calculated using the equation as follows:

$$H' = -\sum (p_i) (\log_2 p_i)$$

Where:

$H'$  : Shannon-Wiener index of diversity;

$p_i$  : proportion of the total sample belonging to  $i$ -th species

### Understory shrub diversity model

The correlations between understory shrub diversity and environmental gradient covariates, including air temperature, humidity, light intensity and wind, were modeled using Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). The AIC was developed using linear regression with straight line fit equations of  $y_i = b_0 + b_1x_i + \varepsilon_i$ . The  $\varepsilon_i$  represents the residuals from the straight line fit. If the  $\varepsilon_i$  is considered to be independent and identically distributed (IID) Gaussian with zero mean, the model contains three parameters:  $b_0$ ,  $b_1$ , and the Gaussian distributions' variance. As a result, we should use  $k = 3$  when calculating the AIC value of this model. In general, the variance of the residuals' distributions should be counted as one of the parameters in any least squares model using IID Gaussian residuals. The measured parameters included in AIC, residual standard error, R-squared, F and P values. To build the model, environmental gradient covariates correlating with

understory shrub diversity were included in the analysis to develop the model. The best model was selected based on the model that has the lowest AIC values. The AIC model tested was presented in Table 1 in which there were 4 models with 4 independent environmental variables as single model and 6 models involving combined independent environmental variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Species and family diversities

In total, there were 828 individuals of understory shrub collected. Those individuals belong to 20 species and 12 families (Table 2). The most abundant species were in the following order of *Rivina humilis* > *Acalypha siamensis* > *Cordyline fruticosa* > *Syzigium paniculatum* > *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*. While, there were understory shrub species that were very rare in term of number of individuals in the Srengseng Urban Forest, including *Xhantostemon* sp., *Abelmoschus esculentus*, *Morus alba*, *Gardenia jasminoides*, and *Glycosmis pentaphylla*.

Families with the highest number of species found in the studied area were Solanaceae (4 species) > Myrtaceae and Euphorbiaceae (3 species) > Rubiaceae (2 species). While in term of number of individuals of each family, Euphorbiaceae and Petiveriaceae had the highest (Figure 2).

### Understory shrub diversity and environmental variables

The results of understory shrub diversity measured as Shannon-Wiener diversity index and environmental variables are presented in Table 3. All measured values were presented with standard deviation and 95% confidence intervals. The Shannon-Wiener diversity index was 0.671. The air temperature was  $25.886^{\circ}\text{C}$  since the research was conducted at rainy seasons while the humidity was quite high at 74.243%. The wind speed was low at 0.428 m/s because the urban forest was protected from the wind due to the presence of buildings nearby. While, the light intensity was measured at 20.313 due to the presences of tree canopy and cloud considering this research was implemented during the rainy season.

**Table 1.** Models used to test the relationships between shrub diversity and environmental gradient covariates

Variables		Model types	Model numbers
Dependent	Independent		
Diversity	Temperature	Single	1
Diversity	Humidity	Single	2
Diversity	Wind	Single	3
Diversity	Light intensity	Single	4
Diversity	Temperature, humidity	Combination	5
Diversity	Temperature, wind	Combination	6
Diversity	Temperature, light intensity	Combination	7
Diversity	Wind, humidity	Combination	8
Diversity	Wind, light intensity	Combination	9
Diversity	Humidity, light intensity	Combination	10

**Table 2.** Understory shrub species, families, and number of individuals in Srengseng Urban Forest, West Jakarta City, Jakarta Province

Species	Family	No. of ind.	Percent. (%)
<i>Xhantostemon</i> sp.	Myrtaceae	1	0.12
<i>Syzigium paniculatum</i>	Myrtaceae	110	13.28
<i>Syzigium oleana</i>	Myrtaceae	51	6.15
<i>Glycosmis pentaphylla</i>	Rutaceae	4	0.48
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	Solanaceae	34	4.1
<i>Capsicum chinense</i>	Solanaceae	8	0.96
<i>Solanum diphyllum</i>	Solanaceae	17	2.05
<i>Solanum bahamense</i>	Solanaceae	5	0.6
<i>Cordyline fruticosa</i>	Asparagaceae	120	14.49
<i>Exocaria cochinchensis</i>	Euphorbiaceae	26	3.14
<i>Acalypha siamensis</i>	Euphorbiaceae	126	15.12
<i>Codiaeum variegatum</i>	Euphorbiaceae	10	1.2
<i>Tabernaemontana</i> sp.	Apocynaceae	30	3.62
<i>Abelmoschus esculentus</i>	Malvaceae	1	0.12
<i>Coffea canephora</i>	Rubiaceae	10	1.2
<i>Gardenia jasminoides</i>	Rubiaceae	4	0.48
<i>Morus alba</i>	Moraceae	2	0.24
<i>Caesalpinia pulcherrima</i>	Fabaceae	84	10.14
<i>Rivina humilis</i>	Petiveriaceae	132	15.94
<i>Pseuderanthemum carruthersi</i>	Acanthaceae	53	6.4
Total		828	100

### Correlations between diversity and environmental variables

The correlations between understory shrub diversity and environmental variables were presented in Figure 3. There are positive and negative correlations. The positive correlations occurred between understory shrub diversity and temperature and light intensity. While the negative correlations were observed for humidity and wind. Figure 4 depicts the Pearson correlation values. The correlation value for understory shrub diversity and light intensity gradients was 0.29 while the value for diversity and humidity gradients was -0.44.

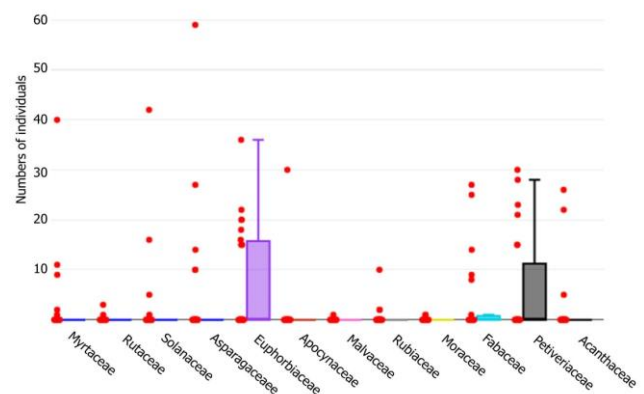
**Table 3.** Diversity index and environmental variables in Srengseng Urban Forest, West Jakarta City, Jakarta Province

Unit	Shannon-Wiener index (H')	Temperature (°C)	Humidity (%RH)	Wind (m/s)	Light intensity (lux)
Mean	0.671	25.886	74.243	0.428	20.313
Standard deviation	0.561	0.895	4.303	0.124	1.329
95% Confidence intervals	0.441, 0.901	25.5, 26.3	72.5, 76	0.378, 0.479	19.8, 20.9

**Table 4.** AIC values of each model showing the correlations between Shannon-Wiener diversity index of understory shrub (H') and air temperature (Temp), humidity (Humid), wind (Wind), and light intensity (Lux) variables

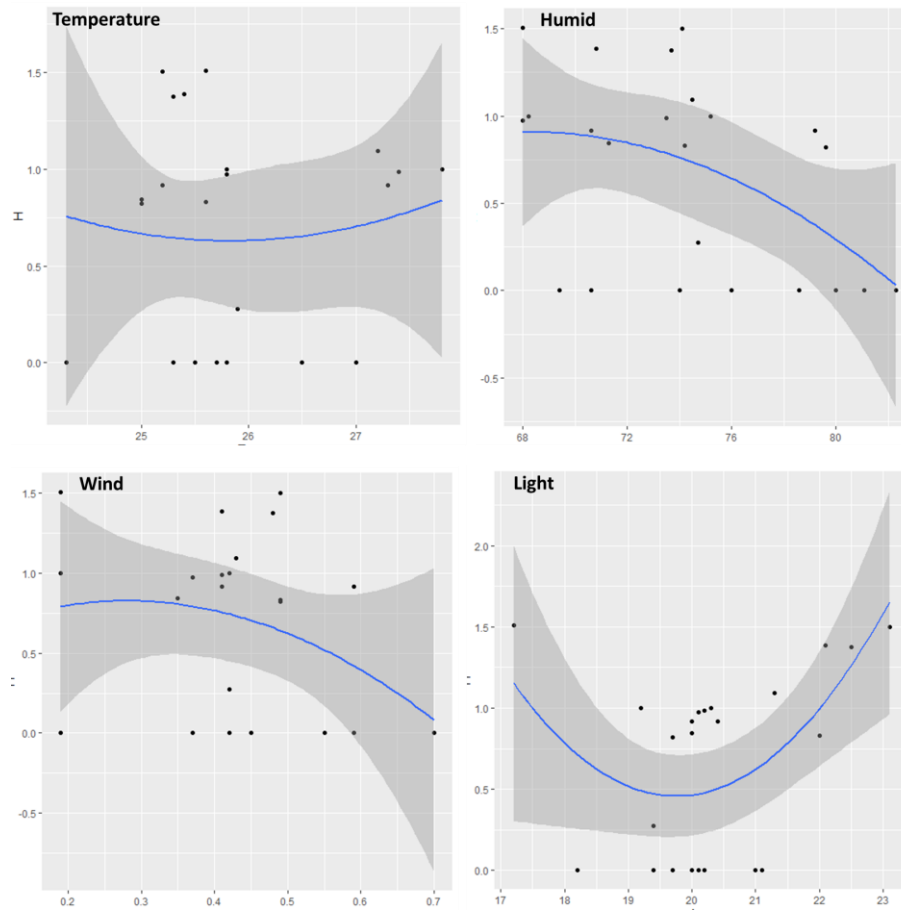
Model	AIC	P	Residual standard error	R <sup>2</sup>	F
H'~Temp	43.630	0.780	0.573	0.003	0.079
H'~Humid	38.696 <sup>a</sup>	0.034	0.515	0.196	5.123
H'~Wind	42.259	0.254	0.557	0.061	1.374
H'~Lux	41.679 <sup>b</sup>	0.177	0.55	0.084	1.946
H'~Temp+Humid	40.696	0.112	0.528	0.196	2.44
H'~Temp+Wind	44.202	0.517	0.57	0.063	0.680
H'~Temp+Lux	43.651	0.407	0.563	0.085	0.939
H'~Wind+Humid	39.295	0.061	0.512	0.243	3.221
H'~Wind+Lux	39.245 <sup>b</sup>	0.059	0.511	0.245	3.249
H'~Lux+Humid	38.900 <sup>a</sup>	0.051	0.508	0.256	3.449

Note: <sup>a</sup>the first best model, <sup>b</sup>the second best model,

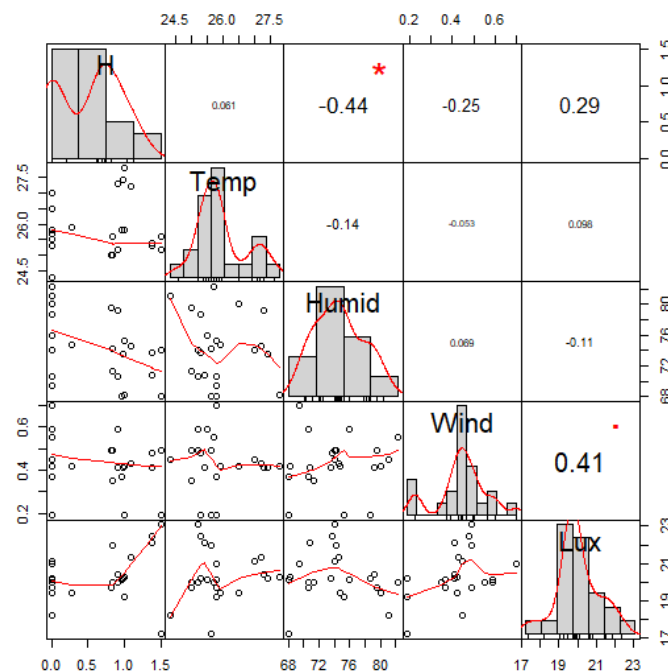
**Figure 2.** Boxplots of numbers of individuals based on understory shrub families in Srengseng Urban Forest, West Jakarta City, Jakarta Province. Red dots are the data points

### AIC models

Table 4 depicts the AIC values for each model. For the singular model involving only single environmental variable, the best model was shown for understory shrub diversity with humidity followed by diversity with light intensity with AIC values of 38.696 and 41.679, respectively. While for combination models, the combined humidity and light intensity had the most significant effect to the understory shrub diversity since it had the lowest AIC value of 38.900, followed by combined wind and light intensity with AIC value of 39.245. The other environmental covariates including temperature and wind speeds were considered have less contribution to the understory shrub diversity. This is because the AIC values for temperature and wind speed were 43.630 and 42.259 which are larger than humidity and light intensity covariates.



**Figure 3.** Correlations between Shannon-Wiener index ( $H'$ ) of understory shrub diversity (Y axis) and air temperature, humidity, wind, and light intensity (X axis). Note: Shaded grey shows 95% CI



**Figure 4.** Pearson correlation values ( $R^2$ ) between Shannon-Wiener diversity index ( $H'$ ) of understory shrub and air temperature (Temp), humidity (Humid), wind (Wind), and light intensity (Lux) variables

**Table 5.** Comparisons of understory shrub diversities from other urban forests

Locations	H' value ranges	No. of species ranges	Sources
Metro Cebu, Philippines	0.774-2.775	11-85	Flores et al. (2020)
Cilegon, Banten	-	7-58	Muhlisin et al. (2021)
Cemoro Sewu, Magetan	-	5-9	Hidayah and Roziaty (2022)
Rajolelo, Bengkulu Tengah	1.059-1.282	21	Sihaloho and Pariyanto (2022).
Srengseng, Jakarta	0.000-1.508	20	This study

## Discussion

The diversity of understory shrub species recorded in this study is compared with other urban forests at regional scales at South East Asia and national levels as presented in Table 5. It indicates that Srengseng Urban Forest has the potentials to support the biodiversity of particular understory shrub species. This study employed AIC to estimate and determine the environmental covariates that contribute mostly to the species diversity. This approach is in agreement with previous study by Monteiro et al. (2022) which used AIC and have confirmed that the near-infrared green ratio in spring obtained from Sentinel-2 satellite scene (NIR/green spring) and ratio of change between spring and summer scenes (NIR/green change) are predictor variables related negatively to species richness.

In this study, as confirmed by the AIC model, humidity was the limiting factor affecting the understory shrub diversity. According to Chia and Lim (2022), relative humidity of ambient air is a critical parameter for vegetation as it influences the water balance and photosynthesis process in the plants.

When relative humidity level is too high or there is a lack of air circulation, a plant cannot make water evaporate as a part of the transpiration process or draw nutrients from the soil (Gubanova and Paliy 2022). The humidity impacts the amount of water evaporating through the plant's leaves. When this occurs for a prolonged period, humid air directly contributes to problems such as foliar and root diseases, slow drying of the growing medium, plant stress, and slow growth. As a result, a plant might rot, causing a decline in number of individuals and decreasing diversity eventually (Chowdhury et al. 2021).

Among environmental covariates, light intensity was a primary supporting covariate for shrub community as indicated by significant AIC values. There was competition between tree stands and understory shrubs to obtain light. A large tree canopy may hinder the sunlight penetration that was required critically by shrub community below to carry out photosynthesis and grow. Result in this study was in agreement with a previous study by Dormann et al. (2020) which confirmed positive effect of light heterogeneity on plant species richness with  $R^2$  values of 0.82. This explains a sharp increase in shrub diversity when light intensity was increasing as recorded in this study.

Wind speed was another environmental factor that significantly fit the model and limited shrub diversity. The negative value of Pearson correlation indicates that an increase in wind speed would cause a decline in shrub diversity. Our result is in agreement with a previous study by Bang et al. (2010), in which Wan et al. (2017) confirm

that wind has a negative effect on the habitat distribution of invasive plants in tropical and subtropical moist biomes. Our study was an urban forest located in tropical moist biomes, and this explains the inverse association of shrub diversity with the wind gradients. The wind speed significantly affects the seed dispersal that determines the distribution of plants, including shrubs. For shrubs, regulated wind speed had a greater impact on short-distance shrub seed dispersal than on long-distance dispersal (Fu et al. 2021).

In conclusion, the diversity of understory shrub was supported significantly by sufficient light intensity and limited by the increase in humidity and air temperature. The combinations of humidity and light gradients will also affect the understory shrub diversity.

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