

Lesson 10: The Eco-History of Our Block

Background for Educators

[From Eric Sanderson's *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City*:]

Fifty-five different kinds of neighborhoods, or ecological communities, were once found on Mannahatta. This is a remarkable number for a landscape so small as Manhattan (only 20 square miles). Fifty-five ecological communities is more than Yellowstone National Park boasts or are found in Amboseli National Park in Kenya. Fifty-five communities is more distinct assemblages of life than are found on the average coral reef or in the most rain forests of similar size. Moreover these communities were special places. Like a neighborhood, an ecological community is defined by the combination of plants and animals (including people) that live there; those plants and animals, together with the energy, soil, water and air of the same place, is called an ecosystem, the system of living and non-living things. Ecosystems vary like neighborhoods, and all the ecosystems together, mapped over the land, form the ecological landscape. Through an extraordinary combination of factors, not the least of which was the presence of the Lenape, Mannahatta in 1609 had come to possess a remarkably varied set of ecological neighborhoods.

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Below is listed all the ecological communities of Mannahatta, 1609. More information about a number of these communities can be found in the "community guides" section of the New York Natural Heritage Program's website, at <http://www.acris.nynhp.org/>.

Marine deepwater	Coastal plain pond	Pitch pine - scrub oak barrens
Marine eelgrass meadow	Eutrophic pond	Chestnut oak forest
Marine intertidal mudflat	Deep emergent marsh	Coastal oak-beech forest
Marine gravel/sand beach	Shallow emergent marsh	Coastal oak-hickory forest
Marine rocky intertidal	Shrub swamp	Oak-tulip forest
Tidal river	Coastal plain pond shore	Appalachian oak-pine forest
Tidal creek	Highbush blueberry bog thicket	Hemlock-northern hardwood forest
Brackish subtidal aquatic bed	Floodplain forest	Successional old field
Low salt marsh	Red maple-hardwood swamp	Successional shrubland
High salt marsh	Vernal pool	Lenape horticultural fields (cropland/row crops)
Salt panne	Coastal plain Atlantic white cedar swamp	Lenape trail (unpaved road/path)
Coastal salt pond	Maritime beach	Lenape shell middens (landfill/dump)
Brackish tidal marsh	Maritime dunes	Lenape wigwams and long houses (human shelter)
Brackish intertidal mudflat	Maritime shrubland	Lenape village site
Brackish intertidal shore	Hempstead Plains grassland	Terrestrial cave
Salt shrub community	Shoreline outcrop	Talus cave
Midreach stream	Calcareous shoreline outcrop	
Marsh headwater stream	Cliff	
Rocky headwater stream	Calcareous cliff	
Intermittent stream	Serpentine barrens	
Coastal plain stream		