



Michael Wang *Extinct in New York*

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LMCC's Arts Center at Governors Island

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in partnership with Swiss Institute

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Extinct in New York

Over the past four hundred years, the living fabric of New York City has been radically reconfigured. Building and excavation, hunting and harvesting, extraction and exploitation have facilitated the arrival of new species and caused others to disappear.

The modern city is a microcosm of ecological catastrophe.

Concrete encases the earth where sphagnum bogs hosted orchids and carnivorous plants. An industrial waterfront replaced salt marshes and coastal dunes. When the Croton Aqueduct opened in 1842, the outflux of waste water suffocated the seaweeds of New York Harbor. The air changed. Coal smoke poisoned the lichens that had hung from hemlocks; a century later these trees too nearly vanished, plagued by an insect introduced with ornamental plants. Forests of steel rose in their stead, as human habitation stretched skyward.

Two thousand species of native plants have been documented in New York City. Many persist within a hybrid urban ecosystem. Others have reappeared in managed green spaces. But New York's herbaria hold records of loss. Some species have not been seen wild in the city for over a hundred years. *Zostera marina*, eelgrass, which formed marine meadows in New York Bay, was last collected in Jamaica Bay in 1883. *Helonias bullata*, the swamp pink with its spike of fuschia blooms, was last collected by Nathaniel Lord Britton, co-founder of the New York Botanical Garden, on Staten Island in 1892.

A city is also an incubator for life.

The city's vast infrastructure for the support of human life sustains other species as well. Tall buildings give shelter to pigeons whose ancestors nested on Mediterranean cliffs. Subways maintain optimal temperatures for rats. In parks, gardeners tend to exotic species thriving far from the environments in which they evolved.

Extinct in New York is a project to nurture a selection of plant, algae, and lichen species that are known historically from New York City but are no longer found growing wild in any of the city's five boroughs. The work imagines a city built not only for humans, but also for those species the growth of the city originally displaced. This is not a project of restoration or rewilding. The return of these species is enabled through technologies of human cultivation and care—a homecoming on life support. The images in this booklet document the process of cultivating the city's lost wild plants under artificial conditions.

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	Species	Last collection in New York City
	Cover: <i>Platanthera ciliaris</i> Orange fringed orchid	Idlewild, Queens 1940
1	<i>Veratrum virginicum</i> Virginia Bunchflower	Near Clove Lake, Staten Island 1885
2	<i>Crotalaria sagittalis</i> Common rattlebox	Meiers Corners, Staten Island 1925
3	<i>Equisetum hyemale</i> Rough horsetail	Bronx Park, Bronx 1899
4	<i>Usnea angulata</i> Beard lichen	Unspecified location c. 1823
5	<i>Doellingeria infirma</i> Cornel-leaved white aster	Maspeth, Queens 1883
6	<i>Physalis virginiana</i> Virginia ground cherry	Near Red Lane, Staten Island 1906
7	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i> Round-leaved sundew	Aqueduct, Queens 1899
8	<i>Eryngium aquaticum</i> Marsh cryngo	Southern Staten Island 19th c.
9	<i>Hypericum densiflorum</i> Bushy St. John's-wort	Bronx Park, Bronx 1938
10	<i>Carex grayi</i> Gray's sedge	Bronx Park, Bronx 1936
11	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i> Andrew's bottle gentian	Greenbelt, Staten Island 1974
12	<i>Acer spicatum</i> Mountain maple	Bronx Park, Bronx 1920

The surveys and historical research on which *Extinct in New York* is based are the work of the New York City EcoFlora Project at the New York Botanical Garden. Last location data is derived from specimens held by the herbaria of the New York Botanical Garden (NY), Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BKL), Staten Island Museum (SIM), and Georgia Southern University (GAS) and from Abraham Halsey's "Synoptical view of the lichens growing in the vicinity of the city of New York".

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AT GOVERNORS ISLAND

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