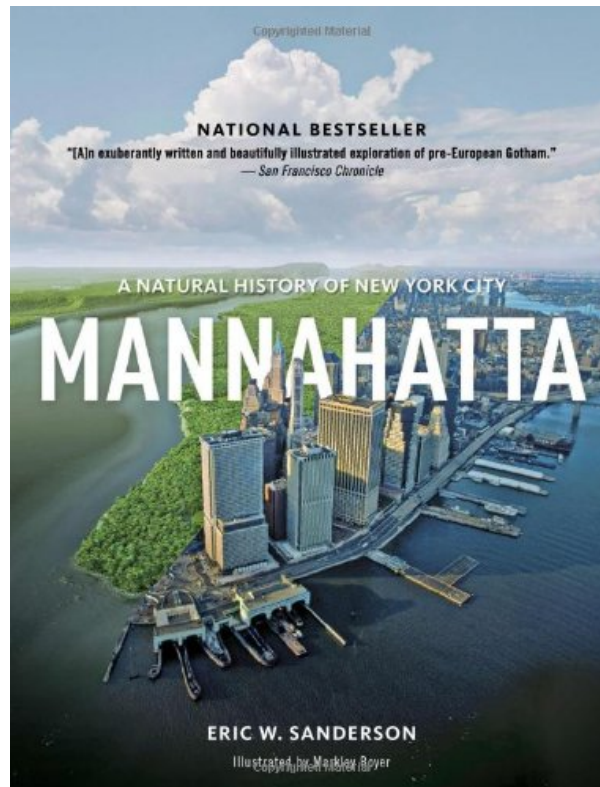
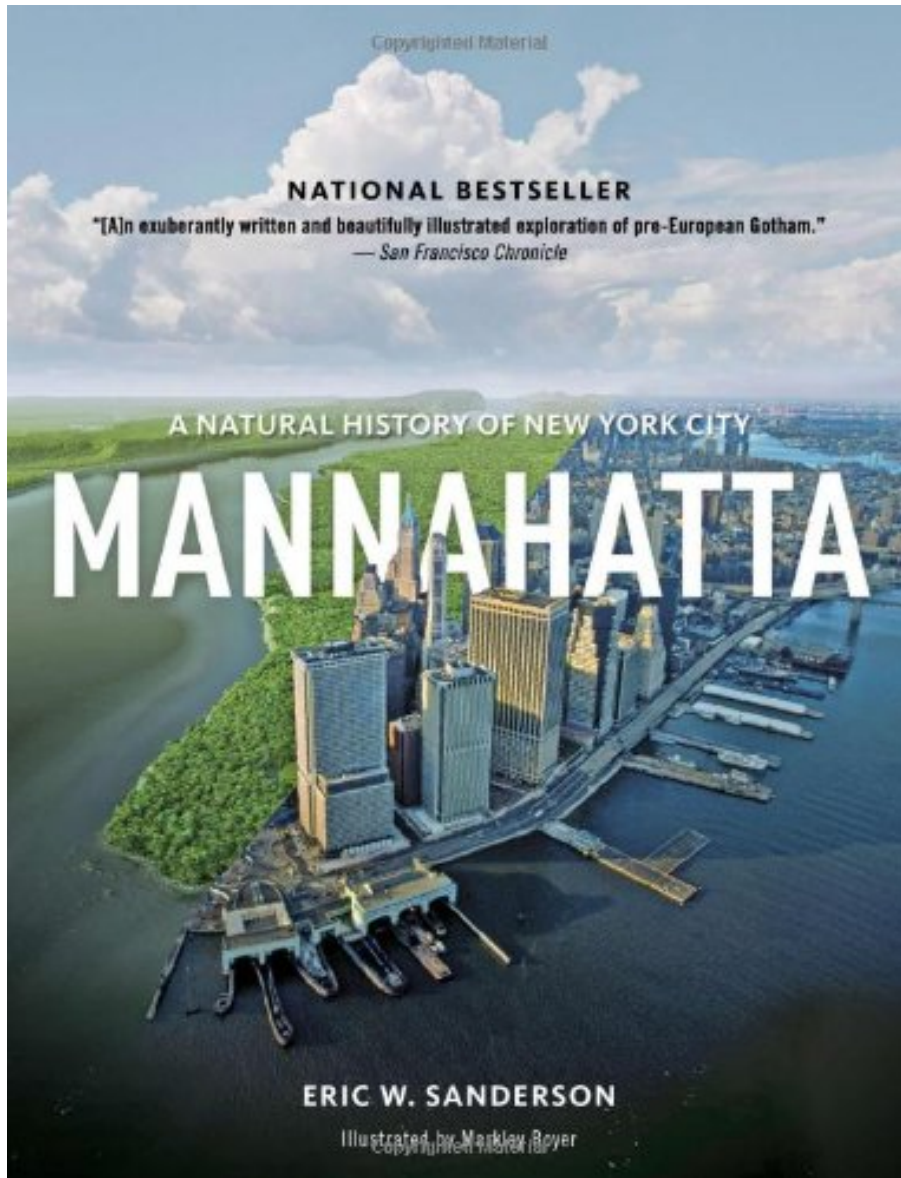


MANNAHATTA: A NATURAL HISTORY OF NEW YORK CITY BY ERIC SANDERSON



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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this brilliantly illustrated volume, Sanderson and Boyer recreate the ecology of Manhattan as it was that 1609 September afternoon when Henry Hudson first saw it, "prodigious in its abundance, resplendent in its diversity." The project began as a simple thought exercise, when senior Bronx Zoo ecologist Sanderson (*Human Footprint: Challenges for Wilderness and Biodiversity*) tried visualizing pre-colonial Manhattan, but was promoted to full-blown science project after Sanderson discovered an "extraordinary" 1776 British Headquarters Map detailing the island's natural terrain. Developing a "georeference" system to coordinate the old map, Sanderson "relates its depiction of the old hills and valleys to their modern addresses." From there, he reconstructs data missing from the historical record using standard scientific tools—examining pollen layers, tree rings, archeological information, etc. Sanderson's text integrates political and sociological history; examines the culture of the original inhabitants, the Lenape (their word *Mannahatta* means "Island of Many Hills"); and covers a wealth of ecological data; he even shares his vision for the ecologically sustainable city of 2409. This wise and beautiful book, sure to enthrall anyone interested in NYC history, boasts maps, charts, photos and artist renderings, thorough appendices (including Lenape place-names and Manhattan's flora and fauna), and an extensive section of "Notes, Sources, and Elaborations." 120 color illustrations.

About the Author

Eric W. Sanderson is a senior conservation ecologist in the Global Conservation Programs of the Wildlife Conservation Society. He is adjunct faculty member at Columbia University and New York University and has lectured at Princeton, Harvard, and Oxford universities, and at TED.

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On September 12, 1609, Henry Hudson first set foot on the land that would become Manhattan. Today, it's difficult to imagine what he saw, but for more than a decade, landscape ecologist Eric Sanderson has been working to do just that. *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City* is the astounding result of those efforts, reconstructing in words and images the wild island that millions now call home. By geographically matching an 18th-century map with one of the modern city, examining volumes of historic documents, and collecting and analyzing scientific data, Sanderson re-creates the forests of Times Square, the meadows of Harlem, and the wetlands of downtown. His lively text guides readers through this abundant landscape, while breathtaking illustrations transport them back in time. *Mannahatta* is a groundbreaking work that provides not only a window into the past, but also inspiration for the future.

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

BEFORE AND AFTER

By adel

This book is illustrated so beautifully it belongs on the coffee table. Its also big and heavily loaded with information. The concept takes Manhattan back to a pristine wilderness showing the habitat of indigenous species and native inhabitants before the colonials arrived. Using GIS, the author has generated maps of landscapes in 1609 that perfectly match current GPS images. Block by block overlays show the location of a Lenape village, stream, or forest. Using a Muir web, the author also reconstructs the ecosystems of plants and animals that vanished when the skyscrapers went up. The Mannahatta project has set up an interactive website, which allows visitors to travel back in time and see an Indian village at the site of the current City Hall or a beaver dam where the Empire State building now stands. The intent is not a call to return to the jungle, just a reminder of how things change.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Problems in description of Lenape culture...

By Wisahkanghend

I would have given this book five stars for the strong research, beautiful pictures and maps, and for the efforts made on reconstructing how NYC would have looked. I give it three stars for some lack of research done on Lenape culture. I am sorry to do so, as the project means well and I have great respect for it.

First, my background: I am a historical ethnobotanist and specialize in native plant use in the Hudson and Delaware River valleys. The authors' list of Lenape plant uses is dismally small and inaccurate. Plenty of literature is available on Lenape plant uses, but most seems to have been ignored.

For one example: there is no evidence (that I have seen) on native people using bedstraw (*Galium* spp.) for bedding. We know that, when camping, the Lenape would have used various fern species, grass species, and when available, hemlock branches (in winter).

Perhaps the old European name 'bedstraw' led the author to the conclusion that native people used it for mattresses.

The list is even dangerously misleading; jack-in-the-pulpit roots and skunk cabbage must be extensively processed before they are edible, not simply 'dug up' or gathered. Both plants are otherwise poisonous, and the important detail of processing is left out of the list. The Lenape today eat (and in the Precontact period, would most certainly have eaten) safe greens in the spring, such as common milkweed shoots. Who would want to eat something difficult and practically inedible such as skunk cabbage? Additionally, there are truly important plants in Lenape daily life that are not included in the list.

Finally, a mostly-fake Lenape story is cited that was written by a known fraud (who bears the grammatically-incorrect 'Lenape' name 'Hitakonanolax').

I am sorry to have written this review; however, with these few things corrected, this would be an excellent book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

The rural countryside of Manhattan

By Glenn H.

For some time, I've idly wondered if Manhattan, in its pre built-up days, ever had streams and ponds, or if it simply wasn't large enough for that. Well, thanks to this book, now I know: it did indeed have them, quite a

few actually. This and so much more I learned from this extensively researched and profusely illustrated look back on what that relatively small island near the Hudson River's mouth looked like before the European settlers got their hands on it.

The detailed descriptions of the island's natural features -- its streams, ponds, hills, woodlands, and so on -- as well as its flora and fauna are fascinating. But what really did it for me were the illustrations: breathtaking views of the beautiful, unspoiled terrain. The pictures alone were worth the price of the book, and in fact my only "complaint" is that I wish there could have been more of them. (Keep in mind, there are already lots and lots of them.) Though, given the incredible amount of detail in the text, I do realize that there simply wasn't enough room for more.

Just so you know, this is a heavy book; it's printed on thick, almost hard-stock paper. I think this definitely helps show the clarity of the illustrations (you can't see through the pages to what's on the other side), but this is not a good book to take with you when you're traveling. Much better to read it at home.

The final chapter, which gives the author's take on what New York City might look like 400 years from now, seemed quite unrealistic to me. He envisions a city whose population resides in densely packed strips along the rivers, while the great majority of the outer boroughs are given over to farmland. There are no cars in Future New York, and the subways have been converted to solely carry freight. People get around on foot, on bicycle, or on streetcars (i.e. old fashioned trolleys) -- and never mind that the reason the subways were built in the first place was because the existing streetcar network couldn't handle the overwhelming passenger traffic, not to mention they were too slow, mired in surface-street congestion. As for long-distance travel, I couldn't quite tell from the simulated satellite view, but it kind of looked like the city's airports have been converted into farmland as well. I guess we'll all be riding trains across the country, or ships across the ocean. ("Back to the future" indeed!)

Certainly, this "back-to-nature" view of the future runs counter to the recent historical trend of suburban sprawl expanding ever outward. It's simply impossible for me to imagine the people of the future being willing to pack themselves in like sardines in high-rise apartment buildings whose windows overlook acres and acres of "empty" farmland right next door. For such a change to occur would require either a sea change in society's views towards its own living arrangements whose scope would be unprecedented in human history -- or else, governmental zoning regulations so draconian that Joseph Stalin would turn away from them in horror.

Nevertheless, I realize that I'm being nitpicky. We can all speculate about what the future holds, but that's not the point. This is not a book about New York's future, but about its past. And in that, it succeeds gloriously. If you've ever wondered what today's "concrete jungle" looked like when it was a real jungle, this is the book for you.

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