

Harlem Meer Exploration Guide

Supported by The Dr. Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation

Suggested for Grades 1 - 5

Welcome to Central Park's Harlem Meer! There is plenty to discover in this aquatic ecosystem.

What is an aquatic ecosystem?

Aquatic ecosystems consist of open water, the water surface, the bottom of the water body, and the shoreline. They are made up of living things, like plants and animals, and non-living things, like water, soil, and rocks. Although the Harlem Meer is a man-made water body, it is still a functioning aquatic ecosystem.

The Harlem Meer as habitat

A habitat is a place that provides five essential things for living things to survive: food, shelter, air, water, and space. Many animals depend on the Harlem Meer as an aquatic habitat. Birds like mallard ducks can be seen in the Meer year-round. Frogs and turtles can frequently be observed in the spring, summer, and fall. Near dusk you can observe bats swooping down above the Harlem Meer, enjoying a banquet of insects.

Plant adaptations

Many plants have adaptations to help them thrive in very wet areas. Although aquatic ecosystems present challenges, like low oxygen levels, plants like cattails, duckweed, and bald cypress have unique adaptations that give them an edge. Bald cypress trees have "knees" called pneumatophores that are thought to help them access oxygen from the air when the tree is rooted in oxygen-poor, watery soil. Cattails produce light, fluffy seeds that can travel by air and water. Duckweed actually floats on top of the water, with a root that will never touch the bottom.

On your walk

Begin at the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center. Walking the perimeter of the Harlem Meer should take about 40 minutes, including stops to observe and discuss aquatic ecosystems.

Plan your visit

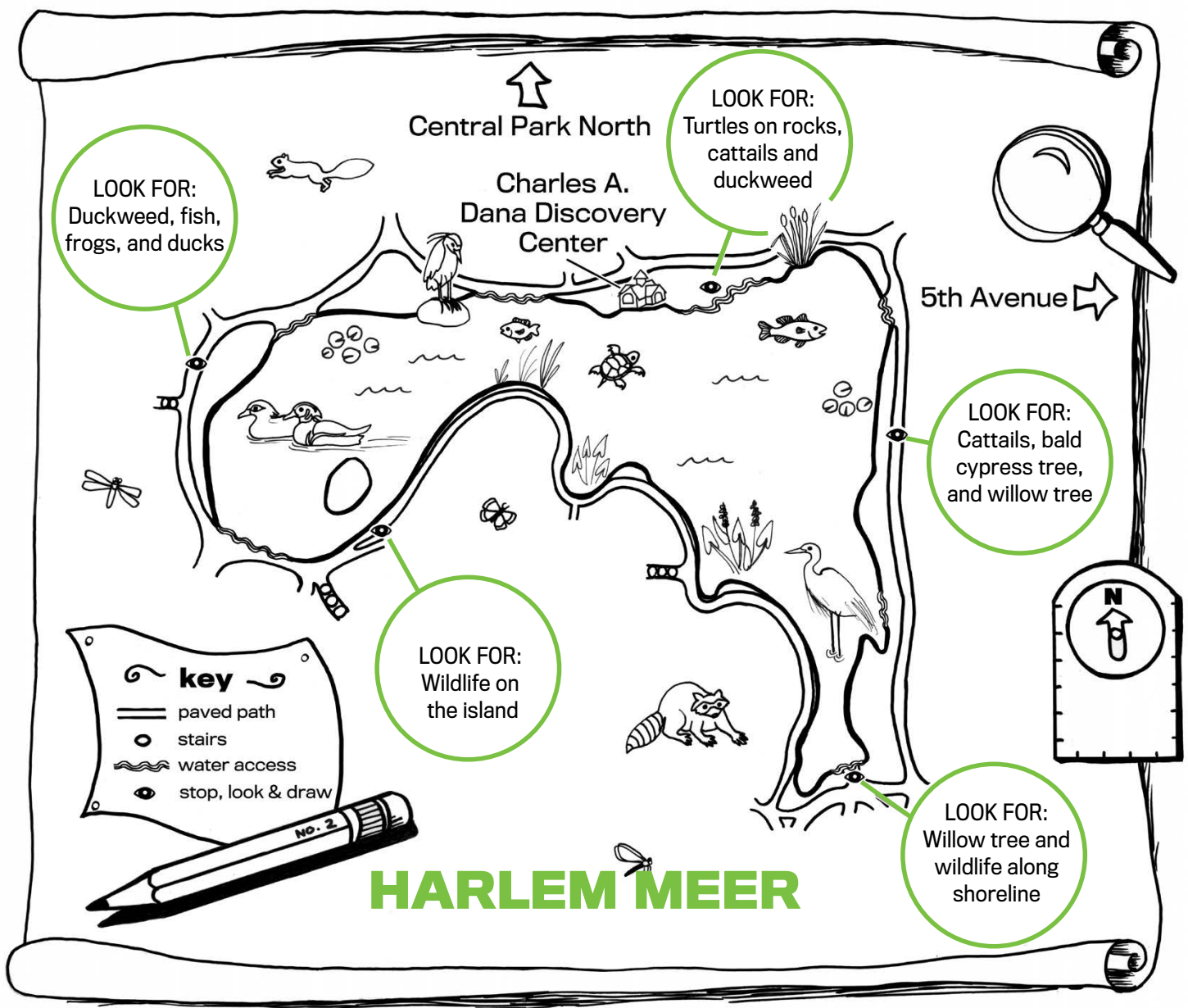
Enhance your experience by checking out a free Discovery Kit that includes binoculars, a hand lens, pencils, sketch paper, and child-friendly field guides. An optional Discovery Journal provides fun activities for children to do in the Park. Advance registration required for groups of five or more. For more information, contact the Dana Discovery Center at 212.860.1370.

Discover Responsibly

Do your part to keep the Harlem Meer healthy and beautiful. Follow these three rules while you explore:

- 1. Keep the wildlife wild.** Wild animals have unique diets and human food isn't good for them.
- 2. Put garbage in its place.** Litter pollutes the Park and can be harmful to animals if eaten.
- 3. Respect the landscape.** Fenced areas give animals and sensitive plantings a break from people.

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Illustrations by Anne Yen

Discover Central Park!

The Central Park Conservancy offers a variety of educational programs and resources to help children explore and discover Central Park, and develop skills for learning and inquiry, all in the world's greatest outdoor classroom. Learn more: centralparknyc.org/discovery

Exploration Guides are additionally supported in part by the Brooke Astor Fund for New York City Education in The New York Community Trust.

The Central Park Conservancy raises 75% of Central Park's annual Parkwide expense budget and is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operations that keep the Park beautiful.

The mission of the Central Park Conservancy is to restore, manage, and enhance Central Park, in partnership with the public.