

# The Animals of Forever Wild

As you walk the trail, listen and look for movement in different layers of the forest.

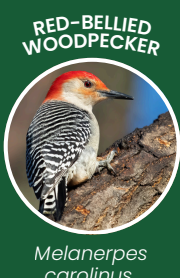
On the ground, American Robins will tilt their heads to pull up insects and worms, while Northern Cardinals can be seen hopping under the bushes cracking seeds.

Down low in shrubs and fallen leaves, you may hear the buzzy song of the Carolina Wren or the “mew” call of a Gray Catbird. Overhead, Blue Jays travel in noisy groups and stash acorns for later.

If you hear tapping or a sudden rattle, it may be a woodpecker at work. The small Downy Woodpecker often drums on thin branches and dead twigs, while the larger Red-bellied Woodpecker calls “churr” and searches bark for insects. Watch standing dead trees (called snags)—they’re important feeding and nesting spots for these birds.

Mammals are shyer, so move quietly. Eastern Grey Squirrels dash along trunks and branches, gathering acorns. At the forest edge, a Groundhog may graze in a sunny opening near its burrow. At dusk, a Brown Bat may swoop overhead, catching insects above the trail. Near dark, you might see a Raccoon climbing a tree or a Skunk shuffling through leaf litter—give both plenty of space and enjoy them from afar.

## What mammals and birds live in a healthy forest?



## Riverside Park Conservancy

### Our Mission

We work in partnership with the New York City Parks Department to restore, maintain and improve 6 miles of parkland between West 59th and West 181st Street.

### Our Vision

We are committed to ensuring Riverside is a dynamic and vibrant space for all to enjoy. As we look to the future, we see a park where all users feel safe and welcomed, where nature is nurtured and protected, and where recreation and programming flourish.

### Our Scope

- 6 miles of parkland
- 30 sports fields and playing courts
- 27 acres of forest
- 16 playgrounds
- 6 dog runs
- 6 pollinator-friendly meadows
- 2,500 benches
- 26,000 trees

### Our Community

- 60+ full-time staff, including 25 gardeners
- 1,200 volunteers
- 1,600 campers at our Sports Camp
- 16 playgrounds
- 40,000 attendees at 400 free programs, including music, movies, fitness and more!
- 3,000,000 park visitors



**Connect with us!**  
[www.riversideparknyc.org](http://www.riversideparknyc.org)

# Forever Wild Forest Guide

West 116<sup>th</sup>–121<sup>st</sup> Streets



## Riverside Park Conservancy



# The Importance of Urban Forests

Between 116th and 121st Streets, Riverside Park holds a small wild forest—a quiet place where trees, shrubs, and soil are allowed to grow naturally, with limited human intervention. Even a short walk here can make you feel calmer and more connected to nature.

This “Forever Wild” area is a safe home for birds, insects, and other urban wildlife. The trees provide shade, cool the surrounding area on hot days, and help clean the air we breathe. Their roots hold the soil and soak up stormwater, which helps protect the Hudson River and nearby paths from flooding and erosion. When a tree falls in this section of the park, it is left in place so that its decaying trunk can provide nutrients to the soil.

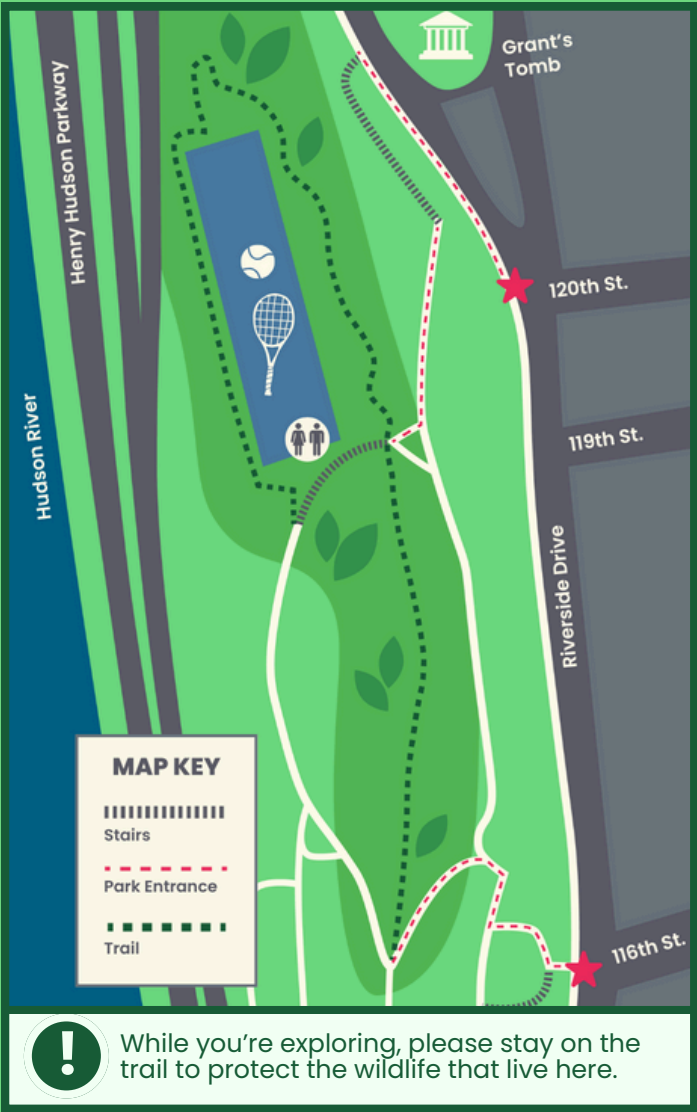
Urban forests like this one are rare and important. They give migrating birds a place to rest and feed, and they provide year-round habitat for native birds and animals that live right here in our neighborhood.

## TIPS TO BE A “TREEEXPLORER”

- Walk slowly and stay on marked paths.
- Notice leaf shape, bark texture, and canopy shape.
- Listen for birds and insects before you move.
- Study the understory: the smaller trees, and the shrub layer where birds and wildlife forage and take shelter.
- Use a notebook or your phone to jot notes or take photos.
- Leave no trace: take only pictures, pick up litter, and don’t disturb plants or wildlife.



## FOREVER WILD FOREST Trail Map



This 0.57-mile loop offers an easy-moderate walk along the forest ridge and is best accessed from the park entrance at 116th Street and Riverside Drive. The trail section north of the tennis courts is home to a Pollinator Meadow that serves as important habitat for pollinating insects and birds.

## What trees grow here?



**Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) & Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*)**

Oaks are some of the most important trees in New York City. They provide resources for hundreds of caterpillars and birds. Their acorns are an important food source for squirrels and other small mammals.



**Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)**

Sweetgums have beautiful fall color but are better known for the spiky balls they produce in the summer that litter the ground. The resin produced by these trees was once used for medicinal purposes.



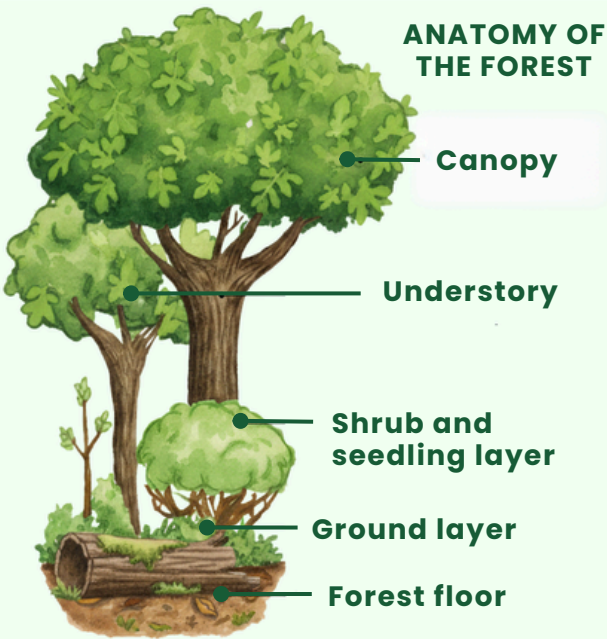
**Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)**

These native cherry trees were prized for their wood, which was used for instruments and furniture. This tree is also the host for Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterflies. Its fruit is bitter when raw but can be cooked into jellies and wine.



**Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)**

Hackberries grow in large colonies and are a great shade tree. They are an important resource for birds and butterflies. Native Americans had many uses for these trees as a spice and a remedy for cold symptoms.



## What shrubs grow here?



**American Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)**

Native witch hazels start to bloom as early as October and are a very important nectar and pollen source for pollinating insects. Witch hazels have a rich history of being utilized for medicinal purposes, including as an astringent, and as dowsing rods to find water for wells.



**Northern Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)**

Spicebush really shines in the fall with yellow leaves. These shrubs get their name from the sweet smell they exude when you crush the leaves or cut the wood.