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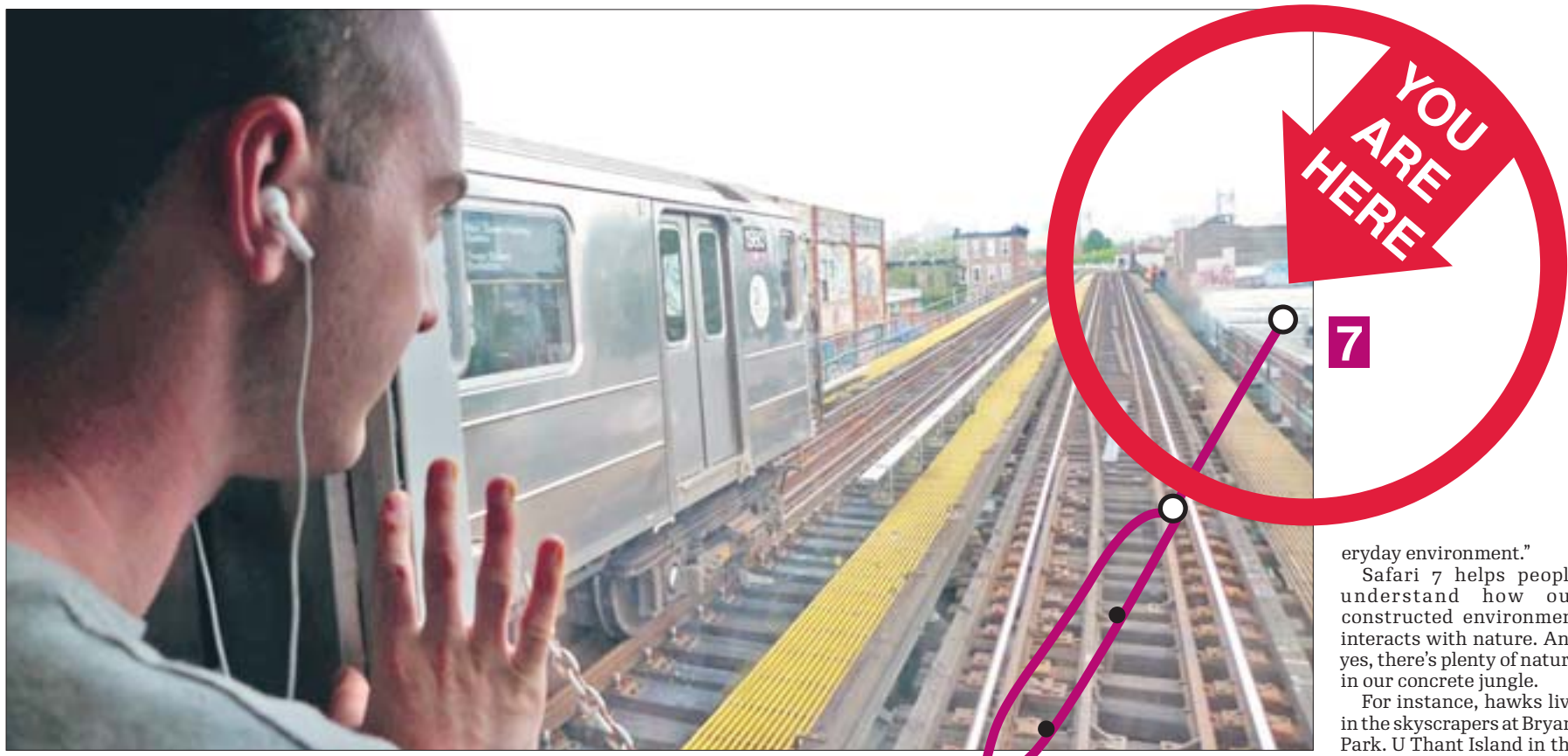

Through podcasts and an exhibit, Safari 7 reveals the layers of life that thrive alongside the No. 7 train line. (COURTESY SAFARI 7)

A 'Safari' on No. 7

Podcasts explore natural wonders along train line

BY ROLANDO PUJOL
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A simple MetroCard swipe along the No. 7 train is your ticket to dozens of cultures and cuisines. That same ride, however, also takes you through a wide range of urban wildlife and ecosystems that interact in unique ways with people and buildings.

Through podcasts and an exhibit, Safari 7 explores the layers of life that thrive on either side of the elevated line's rumble. Think of the podcasts as your personal National Park ranger — for the No. 7 train.

Safari 7 helps New Yorkers "see our city as the thriving ecosystem that it is," said Janette Kim, a director of the program, which is a collaboration between professionals and students from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

The No. 7 line "is both a place to travel on ... but it's also this amazing cut through the dense areas of Manhattan, under the East River, up and then through these neighborhoods and parklands and cemeteries," she said.

Through podcasts that can be downloaded to phones at safari7.org, visitors can learn as they ride the entire length of the line, or get off for a closer look.

"Things that we would all walk by and not think twice about he [an expert on a podcast] went into great detail about. How this works and where this lives and why is the Japanese maple sprouting on this particular corner of this vacant lot," said Kate Orff, a project director. "It's a way of looking much more closely, with a different lens, at your everyday environment."

Glen Cummings, Janette Kim and Kate Orff of the Safari 7 program

Safari 7 helps people understand how our constructed environment interacts with nature. And yes, there's plenty of nature in our concrete jungle.

For instance, hawks live in the skyscrapers at Bryant Park. U Thant Island in the East River was made with rocks from the excavation of the No. 7 train tunnel, and the tiny island is popular with cormorants.

Users also will learn about verdant courtyards in Jackson Heights and the ecology of death at Calvary Cemetery.

In addition to the podcasts, there's an exhibit at Studio X, at 180 Varick St., which has a big table map of the No. 7 route, among other features. The exhibit runs through Dec. 31.

Safari 7 reminds people of "what they already know, that there's kind of cool animal and plant stuff happening outside of the car," said Glen Cummings, a partner in the project.

A touch of New England – with a Bronx accent

Part of the Bronx has a coastline so rocky and rugged you could mistake it for New England. In fact, the borough has many natural getaways that can't be missed. Head to Pelham Bay Park for a taste of Maine.

There are beautiful hiking paths such as the Kazimiroff Trail, as well as little-known gems called Twin Island, Two Trees Island and Hunter Island. The coast is rocky, with stone displaying glacial striations. It's considered geologically to be the southern end of New England's rocky shoreline. Among the thriving wildlife are mussels, crabs and seaweed.

Just south is Orchard Beach, once the Riviera of the Bronx. In the off-season, it's a haven of solitude. You have this beach, created by Robert Moses in the 1930s, all to yourself.

Next, head to City Island. Stroll down City Island Avenue, stopping at spots such as Le Refuge bed-and-breakfast and a range of quaint shops. Wander off to the side streets, which teem with historic homes — Schofield Street is beautiful. At the southern tip of the island are seafood restaurants. Take the No. 6 train to the last stop, then jump on the Bx29 bus and take it to the City Island Circle.

A short walk north are Orchard Beach and the islands. The bus also connects you to City Island just to the south. (ROLANDO PUJOL)

Boating off the coast of City Island, which has the look and feel of a New England fishing village (ROLANDO PUJOL)